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THE WORKS OF

G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE

EDITED BY

SIR HERBERT MAXWELL, BART.

VOLUME II.

KATERFELTO

"NELLY, WILL YOU GIVE ME ONE OF THOSE FLOWERS?"

Frontispiece.

KATERFELTO

A STORY OF EXMOOR

BY

G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY G. H. JALLAND

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INTRODUCTION

"LET every lad learn to ride well, to shoot straight, and to speak the truth." More elaborate than the ancient Persian formula is the education code required by modern civilisation, yet it is well that there are still masters who will not suffer the man to be eclipsed in the student—well for our nation that there are still plenty of apt and willing pupils in the old lore. Of such masters surely none was ever more gentle and unassuming than George Whyte-Melville, none ever set before his disciples a more faultless example of Baldassare's *perfetto cortegiano*. Born in 1821, he was sent in due course to Eton, where, despite the manifest and manifold imperfections of that Alma Mater, on which reform had not yet laid its meddlesome finger, he acquired, as many have done before and since, an affection for the classics which tinged his whole habit of thought. Whyte-Melville entered the army in 1839, and having exchanged into the Coldstream Guards in 1846, left it in 1849. But when the

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war with Russia broke out in 1854 he volunteered for active service, and served throughout the campaign with the Turkish Irregulars.

When peace was declared, he devoted himself to the chase, being especially fond of making young horses. A keen critic and acknowledged arbiter of hunting equipment, his own costume in the field was the reverse of elaborate. He always wore a black coat and jack-boots, and to a friend who once told him he really ought to get a red coat, he replied, "So I will, old fellow, if you like. I daresay the crossing-sweeper in Berkeley Square will lend me one." All that he made by his writings, which must have come to a considerable figure, was spent in good works—not indiscriminate charity, but useful plans for promoting the comfort and recreation of working men, such as reading-rooms for grooms, etc.

Could Whyte-Melville look again into Hyde Park one of these May mornings, or take his place by the coverside among his beloved Leicestershire pastures, his eye would find much on which to rest with pleasure. Twenty years of agricultural depression, it is true, have left their mark on the habits of our youth; many have had to exchange a canter on a hundred-guinea hack for a trundle, at best, on a Beeston-Humber. A good deal of hunting, even, is witnessed from a bicycle—a contrivance which finds no mention in

Whyte-Melville's notes on the world, as he knew it; but if the old acres do no longer send out their squadrons as of yore, new men are there to prove that hand and seat, nerve and grace, are no monopoly of county families, and that the innate qualities of the British race require only means and opportunity to display themselves, *Uno avulso non deficit alter*—as "Nimrod" assuredly would have observed under similar circumstances; if the squire has to send his stud to the hammer, the stockbroker is eager to bid for them, ay, and ready to send them along as straight as if he had been born in the pigskin. Long may it be thus in Merry England! Long may it be before men of means are driven to find their pastime in other and less ennobling scenes, and the twang of horn and cry of hounds is heard no more in our pastures and woodlands!

Most Englishmen learn horsemanship for themselves, beginning at such a tender age that they acquire the art by imitation rather than by instruction. Every generation has its ideals and models, and is apt to despise the elegancies of the *haute école*. Yet Whyte-Melville was too just a critic not to perceive the excellency of *manége*, as well as the fine attainments of natural horsemen. Many persons still living must remember the pleasure they derived from watching the perfect union of both schools in that con-

summate, if peculiarly attired, cavalier, the late Mr. Mackenzie Greaves. Nobody could witness his handling of a horse in the Park or the streets without regretting that Englishmen as a rule, when not riding to hounds, are so careless of bringing out the beauty and fine qualities of their horses. I never saw Mr. Mackenzie Greaves riding to hounds, but his reputation was still bright when I was entered to the chase. Perhaps the present Lord Lonsdale is the best known living example of a skilled *manége* rider whose place is always in the first flight with hounds; how much his mastery of that art contributes to his prowess in the field, rather than impairs it, as some might be inclined to suspect, let the following passage testify from Lord Ribblesdale's charming volume, *The Queen's Hounds.*

"I remember hunting for a few days with Lord Lonsdale some years ago, when he hunted the Woodland Pytchley. One afternoon, latish on in the season, we literally rode into an old dog-fox in Boughton Woods. He jumped up between us. The hounds got right away on the back of the fox. We both started on the back of the hounds. I was riding a handy, quick horse, by Berserker; and those stately woodlands have been well administered and thinned. But Lord Lonsdale lost me in three minutes —not so much because he was riding a faster horse, although I daresay he was, but because of his superior horsemanship and his knowledge of *manége* riding, which, to my mind, especially distinguishes him from other celebrated riders to hounds. It is your legs, and not your hands, which take a horse through trees."

The hunting parson is a character of the past. Probably the greater outward earnestness required

of and given by clergymen of the Church of England in the present day is the symptom of more constant assiduity in their work, yet Whyte-Melville's protest against the unwritten law which has driven them from the hunting-field may find an echo even among ourselves. Priests of the Church of Rome will not be suspected of negligence in their duties or of losing influence with their flocks; yet in the days of Plancus—to wit, when Sam Reynell carried the horn in Meath—I have seen three priests sailing abreast over the wide enclosures of that grassy paradise, and it was seldom that a coverside muster did not contain at least one representative of the cloth. Who shall say that the records of the Church of England would be richer if they contained not the names of such pastors as "Jack" Russell and Charles Kingsley?

Some of the Irish counties, as every hunting man knows, though reckoned among "the provinces," afford sport no whit inferior to that which long since justified the renown of "the shires." The chase still flourishes in "the first gem of the earth and first flower of the sea," despite the adversity which political changes have brought upon its chief supporters; if it languishes in some parts of England and Scotland, it is owing in some measure to the increasing degree in which the fame of Leicestershire has drawn

away men who would be better employed at home. Let some of those read what Whyte-Melville has to say of sport in the provinces, and lay to heart this paragraph from *Riding Recollections* :—

> "If he (the young provincial sportsman) can afford it, and likes to spend a season or two in the shires for the last superlative polish, let him go and welcome! He will be taught to get clear of a crowd, to leap timber at short notice, to put on his boots and breeches, and that is about all there is left for him to learn."

Unluckily for the moral, the preacher was not its most constant exponent. His native Fife holds some good galloping ground, its stout foxes are disciplined by two packs of hounds; but in winter Whyte-Melville was most often to be found south of the Tweed, especially in *angulus ille*, which contains Ranksborough gorse and Ashby pastures. It was there and in that classical neighbourhood that most of his *Riding Recollections* were harvested: at this day they remain profitable reading for young sportsmen. For older ones, what memories do they not revive of the immortals? Lord Gardner, Mr. Gilmour, Lord Cardigan, Jem Mason, Sir Richard Sutton, Sir Charles Knightley, "Bay" Middleton, and many another shade fleet across the page, some of them on horses not less famous in the field than their riders. Types, too, more permanent than individuals—the "hard funker," young Rapid, the Irish "wrecker," the hard-

riding farmer—all are made to pass before us, and stir the pulses again that once tingled to the summons, "Gone away!" Never, not even in "Nimrod's" celebrated "Quarterly Run," has the action and incident of a gallop across the cream of Leicestershire been described with greater fire or reality than in the last chapter of *Riding Recollections*, and here and there through most of his novels. Love-making, of course, must remain the chief *motif* in all romance, but sooner or later Whyte-Melville generally managed to bring his lovers into good terms, with a pack of foxhounds flying over the grass.

Readers of these novels cannot fail to be struck by a constantly recurring note of melancholy which runs through them all, especially in reference to women. Therein may be traced the effect of his own life-long disappointment. It behoves one to deal reverently with the domestic life, even of the departed; but it was matter of common knowledge to all his friends that Whyte-Melville's marriage did not turn out happily. Probably there were faults on both sides—in what quarrel are there not? At all events, one seems to recognise a strain of self-reproach and unavailing regret in "Uncle John's" advice to Algernon Lexley, when about to marry.

"There is one bit of advice I can give. Don't start with too exalted an idea of your goddess. She *must* come down from

her pedestal sometimes. . . . When she does not agree with you don't be provoked with her because she is your wife, but listen to her courteously, though she is talking nonsense, as you would to any other lady. . . . Above all, never attempt to reason with her as you would with a man."

Passages of similar significance may be found throughout the series, but perhaps nowhere do these feelings receive clearer expression than in the remarkable budget of essays entitled *Bones and I*:—

"If Cœlebs (in search of a wife) expects to find a perfection really exist which he thinks he has discovered, while dazzled by the glamour surrounding a man in love, he deserves to be disappointed, and he generally is. . . . What is it we expect to find? In this matter of marriage, more than in any other, our anticipations are so exorbitant that we cannot be surprised if our come-down is disheartening in proportion.

> 'Where is the maiden of mortal strain,
> That may match with the Baron of Triermain?
> She must be lovely, constant, and kind,
> Holy and pure, and humble of mind,' etc.

"Yes, she must be all this, and possess a thousand other good qualities, many more than are enumerated by Iago, so as never to descend for a moment from the pedestal on which her baron has set her up. Is this indulgent—is it even reasonable? Can he expect any human creature to be always dancing on the tight rope? . . . Men are very hard in the way of exaction on those they love. All 'take' seems their motto, and as little 'give' as possible. If they would but remember the golden rule, and expect no more than should be expected from themselves, it might be a better world for everybody."

And then, as if recollecting that the shortcoming had not been all on his own side, the

writer ends his colloquy with Bones, by making his fleshless companion observe—

"I never knew but one woman who could understand reason, *and she wouldn't listen to it.*"

To fox-hunters, Whyte-Melville always must be dear; but his writings appeal to very many whom circumstance or inclination have debarred from the joys of the chase. His characters are generally taken from what is termed "fashionable life"; as a delineator of its phases his perfect familiarity with its ways and peculiarities enabled him to steer clear of those blunders which so often raise a smile at the expense of writers less perfectly qualified.

There is one "recollection," not included in Whyte-Melville's writings, which will certainly occur to his readers. In 1878 he was living at Tetbury; a friend visiting him praised the little house and all its arrangements.

"But isn't it," he asked, "rather too near the churchyard?"

"Perhaps," replied his host, "for some tastes; but the closer the better for a hunting man: they will not have so far to carry him."

"In ploughed land," Whyte-Melville had written in *Riding Recollections*, "choose a wet furrow, . . . but if you cannot find one, nor a footpath, nor a cart-track, trampled down into a certain consistency, remember the fable of the hare and the tortoise, pull your horse back into a trot, and never fear but that you will be able to make up your leeway when you arrive at better ground."

INTRODUCTION

Three years after these lines were first published —as many months after the conversation repeated above—on the 5th of December 1878, Whyte-Melville was riding in a ploughed field. The hounds had found, but were still in cover; he was stealing forward for a start, when, none knows how or why, his horse fell, and the rider never moved again. They laid him in the little churchyard of Tetbury, so close to his own fireside, and who shall doubt that long ere this he has "arrived at better ground"?

HERBERT MAXWELL.

MONREITH, 1898.

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KATERFELTO

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A STORY OF EXMOOR

CHAPTER I

DEADMAN'S ALLEY

ON the last day of April 1763 John Wilkes, refusing to enter into his recognisances to appear before the Court of Queen's Bench, was committed to the Tower by warrant of my Lords Egremont and Halifax, His Majesty's two principal Secretaries of State.

Defiance of constituted authority has never wanted sympathy from that British public which entertains, nevertheless, a profound respect for law. Mr. Wilkes became a hero in consequence; and while many a jug of beer was thereafter emptied, and many a bottle of wine cracked to his health, diverse street songs, more or less execrable, were composed in honour of the so-called patriot, whose personal popularity was incontestable,

notwithstanding the unprepossessing exterior, that has passed into a proverb.

Of these, none were perhaps so absurd as the following ditty, chanted by a chairman more than half drunk, under the windows of a tavern in Covent Garden, notwithstanding the protestations of some half-dozen gentlemen, who, seated at supper in an upper chamber, held that their tastes and opinions were equally outraged by the persistency of the singer below.

"King Nabuchadonosor," whined the chairman.

"Hold that cursed noise!" exclaimed one of the gentlemen from the window.

"King Nabuchadonosor," repeated the chairman in all the aggravating monotony of a minor key.

"You knave!" roared a second voice—"I'll come down and beat you to a jelly, if you speak another syllable!"

A volley of oaths succeeded this threat, but their object stood fire manfully under the discharge, and fixing his eyes on vacancy, proceeded with his song—

"'King Nabuchadonosor
Lived in a golden palace;
He fed from a golden dish, and drank
His swipes from a golden chalice.
But John Wilkes he was for Middlesex,
And they chose him for knight of the shire;
For he made a fool of Alderman Bull,
And called Parson Tooke a liar!'

"Hurrah!" continued the vocalist, who had lost his hat, waving a scratch wig round his bare scalp with an abortive attempt to cheer. King

Nabu—Nabu—cha—donosor was a mighty man" —shaking his head with unimpaired solemnity— "a mighty man, no doubt,

> '*But* John Wilkes he was for Middlesex,
> And they chose him for knight of the shire.'

Hip, hip—Hurrah!"

A burst of laughter rang from the party in the tavern, and a gentleman in a laced waistcoat shut down the window after throwing out a crown piece to the singer in the street.

Night was falling, the air felt chilly, though it was summer, and the party, who had drank several bottles of port, gathered round the fire over a steaming bowl of punch.

They were of all ages between twenty and fifty. One of them wore a wig, another powder, a third had brushed his luxuriant hair to the poll of his neck and tied it in a plain black bow. Their long-waisted coats were cut to an ample width at skirt and sleeves; their waistcoats heavily bound with lace. Knots of ribbon adorned the knees of their breeches, their shoes were fastened with buckles, and each man carried sword and snuff-box. To drink, to fence, to "lug out," as it was called, on slight provocation, to sing a good song, tell a broad story, and spill a deal of snuff in its recital, were, at this period, the necessary accomplishments of a gentleman.

The room in which these worthies had assembled seemed more comfortable than luxurious. Its bare floor was sanded, and the chairs, long-legged, high-backed and narrow seated,

were little suggestive of repose, but the mahogany table had been rubbed till it shone like glass, the wood fire blazed and crackled, lighting up the crimson hangings that festooned the windows, and though the candles were but tallow, there flared enough of them to bring into relief a few pictures with which the unpapered walls were hung. These works of art, being without exception of a sporting tendency, were treated in a realistic style, and seemed indeed to have been painted by the same master:—A fighting-cock, spurred, trimmed, and prepared for battle, standing on the very tiptoe of defiance. A horse with a preternaturally small head, and the shortest possible tail, galloping over Newmarket Heath, to win, as set forth in large print below, "a match or plate of the value of fifty guineas." The portrait of a celebrated prize-fighter, armed with a broadsword, of a noted boxer in position, stripped to the waist. Lastly, an ambitious composition, consisting of scarlet frocks, jack-boots, cocked hats, tired horses and baying hounds, grouped round a central figure brandishing a dead fox, and labelled "The Victory of obtaining the Brush."

One of the party had taken on himself to ladle out the punch. Its effects soon became apparent in the heightened colour and increased volubility of the company. Voices rose, two or three at once. A song was demanded, a glass broken. In the natural course of events, somebody called a toast.

"Blue-Eyes!" shouted a handsome young fellow flushed with drink, waving his glass above his head.

"A fine!" objected the punch-ladler judicially. "By the laws of our society, no member has leave to pledge a female toast. It leads to mischief. Gentlemen, we have decided to draw the line, and we draw it at beauty. Call something else!"

"Then here's John Wilkes!" laughed the first speaker. "He's ugly enough in all conscience. John Wilkes! His good health and deliverance—with three!"

"Hold!" exclaimed a beetle-browed, square-shouldered man of forty or more, turning down his glass; "I protest against the toast. John Wilkes ought still to be fast by the heels in the Tower of London. If he had his deserts John Wilkes would never have come out again, alive or dead, and nobody but a d—d Jacobite, and traitor to His Majesty King George, would venture to call such a toast in this worshipful company. I stand to what I say, John Garnet. It's you to play next!"

Each man looked at his neighbour. The punch-ladler half rose to interfere, but shortly plumped into his seat again, finding himself, it may be, not quite steady on his legs, while the young gentleman thus offensively addressed clenched his glass, as if to hurl it in the last speaker's face. Controlling himself, however, with obvious effort, he broke into a forced laugh, glanced at his rapier, standing in a corner of the room, and observed quietly, "If you desire to fasten a quarrel on me, Mr. Gale, this is neither a fitting time nor place."

"Quarrel!" exclaimed the man behind the punch-bowl; "no gentleman, drunk or sober, would be fain to quarrel on John Wilkes's behalf. Sure, he can take his own part with the best or worst of us, and Mr. Gale was only playing the ball back to your service, John Garnet. You began the jest, bad or good. Be reasonable, gentlemen. Fill your glasses, and let us wash away all unkindness. Here's to you both!"

Mr. Gale, though something of a bully, was not, in the main, an ill-natured man. He squared his shoulders, filled his glass, and pledged the person he had insulted with an indifference that almost amounted to additional provocation. Confident in his personal strength and skill with his weapon, Mr. Gale, to use his own phraseology, was accustomed to consider himself Cock of the Walk in every society he frequented. Nine men out of ten are willing to accept bluster for courage, and give the wall readily enough to him who assumes it as a right. The tenth is made of sterner stuff, resists the pretension, and exposes too often a white feather lurking under the fowl's wing that crowed so lustily and strutted with so defiant a gait.

All this passed through the mind of John Garnet, completely sobered by his wrangle, while he sipped punch in silence, meditating reprisals before the night was past.

This young gentleman, whom nature and fortune seemed to have intended for better things, was at present wasting health and energy in a life of pleasure that failed egregiously to

please, but that succeeded in draining the resources of a slender purse to their lowest ebb. He came of an old family, and indeed, but for the attainder that deprived his father of lands and title, would have been the owner of large estates in the North, and addressed by tenantry or neighbours as Sir John—that father, devoted body and soul to the Stuarts, died at Rome, beggared and broken-hearted, leaving his son little besides his blessing, and an injunction never to abandon the good cause, but bequeathing to him the personal beauty and well-knit frame that Acts of Parliament were powerless to alienate. The young man's laughing eyes, rich colour, dark hair, and handsome features were in keeping with a light muscular figure, a stature slightly above the average, and an easy jaunty bearing, set off by a rich dress, particularly pleasing to feminine taste. Hence, while he repudiated the title of which he had been deprived, it became a jest among his intimates to call him "plain John Garnet," a jest of which the point was perhaps more appreciated by the other sex than by his own.

Plain John Garnet looked somewhat preoccupied now, sitting moodily over his punch, and the influence of his demeanour seemed to steal upon the company in general. Mr. Gale, indeed, held forth loudly on horse-racing, cock-fighting, and such congenial topics, but spent his breath for an inattentive audience, not to be interested even by a dissertation on West-country wrestling in all its branches—the Cornish hug,

the Devonshire shoulder-grip, and the West Somerset rough-and-tumble catch-where-you-can.

At an earlier hour than usual the reckoning was called, and the guests, not very steady, assumed their swords and hats, to pass downstairs into the street. Mr. Gale by accident, John Garnet by design, were the last to leave the room.

The latter placed himself before the door, observing in a quiet tone that the other's reckoning was not yet wholly paid up. "How so?" asked Gale, in his loud, authoritative voice. "The oldest member has taken my half-guinea, and entered it in due course. Will you satisfy yourself, my young friend, by calling the landlord to produce his club-books? Pooh, pooh! young sir; the punch is strong, and you have drunk too much! Stand aside, I say, and let me pass!"

He did not like the set look of John Garnet's mouth; he liked less the low firm tones in which that gentleman repeated his assertion.

"You may or may not be in debt to the club—it is their affair. You owe an apology to one of the members—that is mine."

"Apology!" stormed the other. "Apology! What do you mean, sir? This is insolence. Don't attempt to bully *me*, sir! Again I say, at your peril, let me pass!"

"Do you refuse it?" asked John Garnet, in a low voice, setting his lips tighter while he spoke.

"I do!" was the angry reply. "And what then?"

"Nothing unusual," said the other, while he moved out of the way.

"Drawer! Please to show us an empty room."

A frightened waiter, with a face as white as his napkin, opened the door of an adjoining chamber, set a candle on the chimney-piece, and motioned the gentlemen in.

Garnet bowed profoundly, making way for his senior to pass. The other looked about him in uncertainty, and felt his heart sink, while he heard the voices of their departing companions, already in the street.

He had little inclination to his task. For one moment the burly, square-shouldered man wished himself safe at home; the next, that intermittent courage which comes to most of us, in proportion as it is wanted, braced his nerves for the inevitable encounter and its result. He grasped his rapier, ready to draw at a moment's notice, while the other coolly locked the door.

The waiter, fresh on the town, and unused to such brawls, ran down to summon his master, who was busy over the house accounts in a small parlour below. Till the landlord had added up one column and carried its balance to the next he paid no attention, though his astonished servant stood pale and trembling before him, with a corkscrew in his mouth and a bottle under his arm. Then both rushed upstairs in a prodigious hurry, just too late to prevent mischief.

While yet in the passage they could hear a scuffle of feet, a clink of steel, a smothered oath, and a groan; but as they reached the door it was opened from inside, and John Garnet stood before

them, panting, excited, his waistcoat torn, his dress awry, with the candle in his hand.

"There is a gentleman badly hurt in that room," said he. "Better send for a surgeon at once, and get a coach to take him home." Then he blew out the candle, slipped downstairs in the dark, and so into the street.

The gentleman was indeed so badly hurt that all the energies of the household were concentrated on the sufferer. Nobody had a thought to spare for the assailant till long after pursuit would have been too late. Mr. Gale was wounded in the forearm, and had received a sword-thrust through the lungs. With the landlord's assistance he made shift to walk into a bedchamber, where they undressed and laid him carefully down; but before a surgeon could arrive there was obviously no hope, and he only lived long enough to assure the doctor, in the presence of two witnesses, that the quarrel had been of his own making, and was fought out according to the usual rules of fair play.

"I was a fool not to close with him," murmured the dying man, reflecting ruefully on the personal strength he had misapplied. "But the rogue is a pretty swordsman; quick, well taught, supple as an eel, and—I forgive him!"

Then he turned on his side, as the landlord subsequently stated, and thereafter spoke never a word more, good or bad.

John Garnet meanwhile made the best of his way into the street, with the intention of proceeding straight to his lodgings, and riding out

of London next morning at break of day. Duels, though of no rare occurrence, were serious matters even in a time when every man carried a small-sword by his breeches-pocket; and to be taken red-handed, as it were, from the slaughter of an adversary, would have entailed unpleasant consequences to liberty, if not to life. While it had been established that a gentleman was bound to defend his honour with cold steel, it seemed also understood that in such encounters even victory might be purchased at too dear a price. Nevertheless, so riotous were the habits of the day, encouraging to the utmost card-playing and the free use of wine, so lax was the administration of the law, and so stringent the code of public opinion, that scarcely a week passed without an encounter, more or less bloody, between men of education and intellect, who would have considered themselves dishonoured had they not been ready at any moment to support a jest, an argument, or an insult with naked steel. John Garnet therefore, observing an ancient watchman pacing his sluggish rounds, turned aside into a by-street rather than confront this guardian of the peace; and hastening on as he became less certain of the locality, was aware that his strength began to fail, and felt his shirt clinging to his body, wet and clammy with something that must be blood.

For an instant he thought of turning back into the more frequented thoroughfare; but the hum of voices, and increasing tread of feet, seemed too suggestive of discovery, and he stumbled onwards, in faint hope of reaching the dwelling

of some obscure barber-surgeon who might stanch his wounds, and send for a coach to take him home.

Twice he reeled against the wall of a certain dark passage, called Deadman's Alley, down which he staggered with uneven steps, and had almost decided that he must sink into the gutter, and lie where he fell till a passer-by should pick him up, when he descried a red lamp in a window ahead, and summoned all his strength to make for it as his last hope. Half blind, half stupefied, he groped and blundered on, with a dull, strange fancy that he was on the deck of a ship, labouring in a heavy sea, while she made for a harbour light that seemed continually to dip and disappear behind the waves. The illusion, though not so vivid, was similar to a dream, and the languor that accompanied it something akin to sleep; till in a moment, while through his brain there came a whirr as in the works of a watch when it runs down, the light widened, broke into a hundred shafts of fire, went out, and all was dark.

CHAPTER II

PORLOCK BAY

HIGH WATER in Porlock Bay. The tide upon the turn—sand-pipers, great and small, dipping, nodding, stalking to and fro, or flitting along its margin waiting for the ebb; a gull riding smoothly outside on an untroubled surface, calm as the soft sky overhead, that smiled lovingly down on the Severn Sea. Landward, a strip of green and level meadows, fringed by luxuriant woodlands, fair with the gorgeous hues of summer; stalwart oak, towering elm, spreading walnut, stately Spanish chestnut, hard mountain ash, and scattered high on the steep above dotted thorns and spreading hazels, outposts, as it were, of delicate feathering birches, to guard the borders of the forest and the waste; fairyland brought here to upper earth, with all its changing phases and variety of splendour. The wild-bird from her nest in Horner Woods needed but a dozen strokes of her wing to reach the open moorland that stretched and widened ridge by ridge, and shoulder by shoulder, till its rich carpet of heather was lost in the warm haze that came down on Dunkerry Beacon, like a veil from the sky.

Far away towards Devon lay a land of freedom and solitude, haunt of the bittern and the red deer, intersected by many a silent coomb and brawling river, to expand at last on the purple slopes of Brendon, or the wet grassy plains of Exmoor. Travelling over that interminable distance, the sense of sight could not but weary for very gladness, and turned well pleased to rest itself on the white cliffs of the Welsh coast opposite, and the faint blue of the intervening waters, calm and still, like the eyes of a girl whose being has never yet been stirred into passion by the storm.

Above, below, around, Porlock Bay was decked in her fairest garb. Earth, air, and water seemed holding jubilee; but the loveliest object in earth, air, or water was a maiden seated on a point of rock washed by the drowsy lap and murmur of the tide, who seemed pondering deeply yet in simple happy thought — a maiden of comely features and gracious presence, the sweetest lass from Bossington Point to Bideford Bay, nimble with needle, tongue, and finger, courteous, quick-witted, brave, tender-hearted, the light of a household, the darling of a hamlet, the toast of three counties,—and her name was Nelly Carew.

She had sat the best part of an hour without moving from her place, therefore she could not be waiting for an expected arrival. She swung her straw hat backwards and forwards by its broad blue ribbon, with the regularity of a pendulum, therefore her meditations could have been of no agitating kind; and she looked straight

into the horizon, neither upward like those who live in the future, nor downward like those who ponder the past. Nevertheless, her reflections must have been of an engrossing nature, for she started at a man's footstep on the shingle, and the healthy colour mantled in her cheek while she rose and put out her hand to be grasped in that of a square-shouldered, rough-looking personage, whose greeting, though perfectly respectful, seemed more cordial than polite.

"Good even, Mistress Nelly," said the newcomer, in a deep sonorous voice; "and a penny for your thoughts, if I may be so bold; for thinking you were, my pretty lass, I'll wager a bodkin, of something very nigh your heart."

She turned her blue eyes—and Nelly Carew's blue eyes made fools of the opposite sex at short notice—full in the speaker's face.

"Indeed, Parson," she answered, "you never spoke a truer word in the pulpit, nor out of it. I've turned it over in my mind till I am dazed with thinking, and I can't get her to sit, do what I will."

"Sit!" exclaimed the other. "Where and how?"

"Why, the speckled hen, to be sure!" answered Nelly rather impatiently. "If she addles all these as she addled the last hatch, I'll forswear keeping fowls, that I will—it puts me past my patience. How do you contrive with yours, Mr. Gale? though, to be sure, if I was a parson, like you, I wouldn't keep game-cocks. I couldn't have the heart to see the poor things fight!"

Parson Gale made no attempt to justify this secular amusement. He was one of those ecclesiastics, too common a hundred years ago, who looked upon his preferment and his parish as a layman of the present day looks on a sporting manor and a hunting-box. Burly, middle-aged, and athletic, there were few men between Bodmin and Barnstaple who could vie with the Parson in tying a fly, setting a trimmer, tailing an otter, handling a game-cock, using fists and cudgel, wrestling a fall, and on occasion emptying a gallon of cider or a jack of double ale. Nay, he knew how to harbour a stag, and ride the moor after him when the pack was laid on, with the keenest sportsman of the West, and if to these accomplishments are added no little skill in cattle doctoring, and some practical knowledge of natural history, it is not to be supposed that the Reverend Abner Gale found much leisure for those classical and theological studies to which he had never shown the slightest inclination.

"It is but their nature," said the Parson, reverting to the game-cocks, of which he owned a choice and undefeated breed. "It comes as natural for them to fight as for me to drink when I'm dry, or for your old grandfather to sit and nod over the fire. Or for yourself, Mistress Nelly,"—here the Parson hesitated and tapped his heavy riding-boots with his heavier whip,—"to bloom here in the fresh air of the Channel, like a rose in a bow-pot. There's a many would fain gather the rose, only they dursn't ask for fear of being denied."

"Why the Speckled Hen to be sure."

The latter part of the sentence was spoken low enough for Nelly, even if she heard it, to ignore.

"And what brought you here this afternoon?" she inquired in her frankest tones. "It's a long ride across the moor, Parson, even for *you*, and not much of a place when you get to it. If it had been Bridgwater now, or Barnstaple, sure you would have seen a score of neighbours, men and women, to tell you the news, and wind up the night with a junket or maybe a dance. But here," and Nelly burst into a merry laugh, "our only news is that the speckled hen seems as obstinate as a mule, and Farmer Veal brought a roan nag horse home this morning from Exeter. I daresay you've seen it already. As to dancing, if you must needs dance, Parson Gale, it will have to be with grandfather or me!"

"And I'd dance all night with both," he answered, "to be sure of a kind word from one of them in the morning. Do you really care to know what brought me here to-day, Mistress Nelly; and will you promise not to be hard on me if I tell you the truth?"

There was something ludicrous in the contrast of his rough exterior and timid manner while he spoke. He was a thick, square-made man, built for strength rather than activity, with a coarse though comely face, bearing the traces of a hard out-of-door life, not without occasional excesses in feasting and conviviality. His short grizzled hair made him look more than his age, but in spite of his clumsy figure there was a lightness in his step, an activity in his gestures, such as

seldom outlast the turning-point of forty. He was dressed in a full-skirted riding-coat, an ample waistcoat that had once been black, soiled leather breeches, and rusty boots garnished with a pair of well-cleaned spurs. Even on foot, and up to his ankles in shingle, the man looked like a good rider, and a daring resolute fellow in all matters of bodily effort or peril, not without a certain reckless good-humour that often accompanies laxity of principle and habits of self-indulgence. Many women would have seen something attractive even now in his burly strength and manly bearing; would have thought it worth while, perhaps, to wean him from his game-cocks and his boon companions, to tempt him back into the paths of sobriety, good government, and moderation. Among such reformers he would fain have counted Nelly Carew.

"You must tell it me in the house, then," said she, rising hastily, and looking up at the sky as if in dread of a coming shower. "It's time I was back with grandfather to give him his posset—I left it simmering on the hob more than an hour ago. Poor grandfather! He never complains, but I fear he frets if I keep away from him long. It must be dull for him sure, after the life he led once, dukes and princes and counts of the empire and what not—why, his very snuff-box belonged to Prince Eugene; and now he has nobody to speak to but me! Come in, Mr. Gale, and welcome; it will freshen him up a bit to see a new face, for I think he seems poorly this morning; you may walk straight into the parlour—you

know your way well enough—while I go and look after supper. You'll eat a morsel with us, won't you, before you ride across the moor?"

Thus staving off any further explanation of the Parson's hints, Nelly Carew led the way to the pretty and commodious cottage she called her home, stopping at the door to prune a broken twig from the myrtle that flourished by the porch as luxuriously as though North Devon were the South of France. Parson Gale, noting the trim garden, the well-ordered flower-beds, the newly-thatched roof, and general air of cleanliness and decency that pervaded the establishment, could not repress a strong desire to own the treasure thus comfortably bestowed. There was the casket. Would he ever succeed in carrying off its jewel to make the light of his own hearth the ornament on his own breast?

It seemed but yesterday she came here a smiling little lass of nine or ten, the darling of that worn-out soldier, whose life had commenced so eventfully, to dribble out its remaining sands in so quiet and obscure a retreat. Of old Carew's history he only knew thus much, that the veteran had passed a wild unbridled youth, a stormy and reckless manhood; that he had been tried for rebellion in '15, and risked his head, already grey, once more in '45, escaping imprisonment and even death on both occasions by the interposition of powerful friends and in consideration of his services on the Continent during the war. Even John, Duke of Marlborough, spoke out for the man he had seen at Malplaquet, holding his own

with a pike against three of the Black Musketeers, and who carried his weapon in a cool salute to his commander the instant he had beaten them off. But Carew never prospered, despite his dauntless courage and undoubted military skill. Now some fatal duel, now some wild outrage on discipline and propriety brought him into disgrace with the authorities, and men who were unborn when he first smelt powder commanded regiments and brigades, while he remained a simple lieutenant, with a slender income, a handsome person, and a reputation for daring alone.

Such characters marry hastily and improvidently. Carew's wife died when her first child was born, a handsome little rogue, who grew to man's estate the very counterpart in person and disposition of his graceless sire. He, too, married early, and in defiance of prudential considerations ; gambled, drank, quarrelled with his father, and lost his life in a duel before they had made friends. Old Carew's hair turned grey, and his proud form began to stoop soon after his son's death, for he loved the boy dearly, none the less perhaps because of those very qualities he thought it right to reprove. Then he took the widow and her little girl to live with him at a small freehold he inherited near Porlock ; but young Mistress Carew did not long survive her husband, and the old man found himself at threescore years and ten the sole companion of a demure little damsel not yet in her teens, whose every look, word, and gesture reminded him cruelly of the son he had loved and lost.

These two became inseparable. The child's

mother had imparted to her a few simple accomplishments,—needlework, housekeeping, a little singing, a little music, the French language as she had herself acquired it in a convent abroad; above all, those womanly ways that not one woman in ten really possesses, and that made the charm of what is called society no less than the happiness of home.

Little Nelly was still in her black frock when, taking a Sunday walk hand-in-hand with her grandfather, she looked up in his face, and thus accosted him—

"When I'm big," said she, "I'll have a little girl of my own. I shall take her out a-walking, and be kind to her, as you are to me. You won't like her better than me, grandfather, will you?"

"You may be sure of that, Nelly," was his answer, while he marvelled how this blue-eyed mite had come to be dearer to him than all his loves and memories of the past; wishing he could have shaped his whole life differently for her sake.

"I shall always be your little girl, grandfather," continued Nelly; "I couldn't do without *you*, and you couldn't do without *me*, so you need not be afraid of my ever going away to leave you—I promise—there!"

"But, if you marry, Nelly?" said he, laughing, for to his little maid this affirmation was the most solemn form of oath.

"I shall never marry," answered Nelly, with exceeding decision—"no more shall my little girl."

And now it seemed the old warrior's turn to be

dependent on the grown woman he had loved and cherished in her childhood. It was true enough that he fretted and pined for her if she stayed many hours out of his sight. It was pitiable to mark how, day by day, the intellect failed in proportion as the goodly form dwindled to decay. The old oak that had reared its branches so sturdily was bowed and sapless now. The soldier of Oudenarde and Malplaquet, who had sat at table with Marlborough and Prince Eugene, was fit for little more than to doze in an easy-chair, longing for his grandchild's home-coming, and nodding, as Parson Gale said, feebly over the fire.

Even that worthy felt struck with something of awe and apprehension while he looked on the wasted limbs that he had heard quoted by old neighbours for their strength, and reflected that the time was coming when he too would no longer be able to sit a horse or wrestle a fall. What had he to look forward to? What resources against that day of debility and stagnation, unless, indeed, he could prevail in his suit with Nelly Carew? Therefore did Parson Gale exert all his powers of conversation, hoping to render himself agreeable to the girl as she passed in and out furthering the preparations for their simple meal. He drew on his memory, his mother-wit, and his invention for subjects that might be interesting to both his companions. For old Carew he detailed at great length the particulars of a wrestling-match, and subsequent drinking bout, at both of which he had lately

assisted in his own parish; while to Nelly he expatiated on the convenience of his kitchen, the coolness of his larder, the luxuries of his best parlour in the parsonage at home; but, in spite of all his efforts, he experienced a dim sense of failure and depression. Notwithstanding his calling, the man was superstitious rather than religious; and when he rose to take leave, could not forbear expressing a conviction that some great misfortune must be impending on him or his.

"I've heard tell of men feeling just like me," said he, holding Nelly's hand rather longer than good breeding required, "and being found next morning stark dead on the moor. There was a woman up at my place only last Martinmas, and she says, 'Parson,' says she, 'there's something coming to me that's past praying for; I know as well as if I saw it. I'm that down-hearted, I don't seem to fill my bodice, and there's a din in both my ears like the waves of a flood-tide, so as I can't scarce hear myself speak.' It wasn't a month before her only brother got drowned off the Lizard; and will you tell me now, Mistress Nelly, as you did once before, that such warnings are but idle fancies and old women's fables? I'm down-hearted too; I'm not ashamed to say so. And when it's fallen on me, whatever it is, I should like to know who will care a pinch of snuff what's gone with wild Abner Gale?"

"I wouldn't speak so, if I were you," answered the girl, who, having disengaged her hand, was now standing at the cottage door to see him

mount for his homeward ride across the moor. "There are plenty of all sorts to welcome you when you come, and wish you 'good-speed' when you go away—you that have so many friends."

"Friends!" repeated the Parson, turning his mare's head homewards, with a bitter smile. "The church wouldn't hold my acquaintance, but the pulpit is large enough for my *friends*!"

CHAPTER III

WAIF

DEADMAN'S ALLEY was at all times a secluded thoroughfare ; after dark, indeed, its echoes rarely woke to the sound of a footstep ; and the watch, reflecting, perhaps, that such loneliness saved them a deal of trouble, abstained from disturbing its repose. An empty cask, a bale of goods, or a human body thrown aside in Deadman's Alley, might have remained there many hours without attracting the notice or obstructing the transit of a passenger.

John Garnet, however, was unusually fortunate, for he had wallowed in the gutter but a few minutes when a girl's step came dancing along the alley, and the lightest foot in London tripped over him as he lay at length upon the stones, not quite unconscious, yet altogether powerless to move. The girl, who had nearly fallen, recovered her footing with the activity of a cat ; and smothering an exclamation in some outlandish tongue, peered down through the darkness to discover the nature of her stumbling-block. Then she felt that her naked ankles, for she wore no stockings, were wet with blood. In an instant

she flew to the little red lamp for which John Garnet had been making when he fell, tapped hard at the latticed window whence it shone; and after a hurried whisper with someone inside, returned in equal haste, accompanied by an old man wearing a skull-cap and black velvet gown. Together they lifted their burden in a deliberate business-like manner, as though they traded habitually in such goods, and carried it into their dwelling, carefully securing the shutters of the lattice and closing the door.

When John Garnet recovered his senses he thought he must be dreaming, so like a trick of Fancy was the scene to which he awoke. Above him hung heavy bed-curtains of a rich brocade, under his head was a laced pillow, and he lay on a scarlet coverlet bound with a border of blue. His eyes, travelling lazily round the room, rested on a silver lamp, fed by some aromatic oil; and when he closed them again, wearied by the exertion, gentle hands pressed a cordial to his lips, and a consoling voice whispered in his ear—

"Courage, my young friend. Do not attempt to raise your head. Another sip, Waif. Good. In five minutes he will come to."

In five minutes he did come to, and found strength to ask what had happened and where he was?

"The first question you must answer for yourself," said the grave old man who sat by his bedside with a finger on his pulse. "To the second I reply, make your mind easy; you are in the house and under the care of the celebrated

Doctor Katerfelto, who has won more games of skill against death than any practitioner now alive. Waif, bring me the roll of lint that stands on the top shelf in the surgery. Look in the middle drawer for some red salve, and put that flask out of my patient's reach."

The girl had left the room, and was back again quicker than John Garnet's languid senses could follow her movements. When she returned with these simple remedies, he did not fail to mark the softness of her dark eyes, the subdued grace of her bearing, the sweet and loving pity that seemed to pervade her whole being while she hovered about his couch and administered skilfully to the wants of a wounded man. Nor was this tenderness, this sympathy, this almost maternal solicitude, in accordance with her general habits, in keeping with her type of form and feature. She looked more like a panther of the wilderness than the nurse in a sick-room. The lithe and supple frame, the light and noiseless gait, the quick stealthy turn of ear and eye and limb, ready on the instant for attack, defence, or flight, all this partook of the fierce, feline nature, and all this she inherited from that mysterious race to which she belonged, whose origin history has failed to discover, whose destiny conjecture is at a loss to guess. From her gipsy ancestors she derived her tameless glances, her nimble strength, her shapely limbs with their delicate extremities, her swarthy savage beauty and light untiring step. From them, too, came the wild blood that boiled

under restraint or contradiction, the unbridled passions that knew no curb of custom nor of conscience, the cunning that could conceal them till occasion offered, the recklessness that would then indulge them freely without pity or remorse.

John Garnet had never yet seen anything so beautiful as this tawny girl bending over his couch, with gold coins studding her jetty hair, with collar and bracelets of gold round her neck and wrists, with a shawled robe of scarlet and orange reaching to her naked ankles, and broad buckles of gold in her red-heeled shoes.

He thought of Cleopatra, young, whole-hearted, and untainted by the kiss of an emperor; of the Queen of Sheba, before she fathomed the wisdom of Solomon. Then he thought the dark eyes looked at him more than kindly, and fell to wondering how she came here, and what relation she bore to this old man in the velvet gown who sat by his pillow with a grave attentive face. But the cordial was doing its work. Ere his wounds had been dressed, the salve spread, and the lint bandages deftly swathed round his body, John Garnet's senses lost themselves once more in oblivion; the last words he heard were in the doctor's voice. Listening for the girl's answer he fell sound asleep.

"There is no fear now," said Katerfelto reflectively. "Shall I say there is no hope? He would have made a beautiful subject, and I wanted just such an one to bring my new discovery to perfection. Look at his chest, Waif. Did you ever see a finer specimen? Some

men in my place would be incapable of this self-denial."

Waif, as he called her, turned pale under her tawny skin, but there was a fierce glitter in her eyes while she answered, "I thought he was dead, you may be sure; that was why I brought you out to him. He'll get well now. So much the better! Patron! you dare not do it."

The old man smiled, stroking his velvet gown with a white well-cared-for hand.

"Dare not, or will not, or shall not," he replied. "It little matters which. No. It is an interesting case as it stands, and to cure him will be almost as instructive as to cut him up. Science, Waif, exacts from us great sacrifices, but she has also her rewards. The man will live, I think. Live probably to be ungrateful. Meanwhile, let us see who and what he is."

Thus speaking, and with a marvellous dexterity, the result of long practice, he turned every one of the sleeper's pockets inside out, felt in his cravat, his bosom, his waistband, leaving no part of his dress unsearched, yet without in the slightest degree disturbing his repose. The girl, holding the lamp to assist, looked down on the prostrate figure, with a new sensation growing up in her heart, a vague wild longing that seemed to covet no less than to pity and admire.

"The outcome is unequal to the pains bestowed," said Katerfelto, holding up a light purse, a tavern bill, and a valueless snuff-box, as the fruit of his exertions. "Yet the man is well-born, Waif, and well-to-do, or I am mistaken.

In due time we shall know more about him ; there is no hurry. He cannot leave that bed for a week ; nor this house, I should say, for a month. It's a beautiful case. Beautiful ! the other gentleman's sword must have gone through to the very hilt ! "

" Patron ! will he die ? " asked Waif, with a tremble of the lip she tried hard to conceal.

" Most assuredly ! " was the answer. " So will you, and so shall I. But not of such a scratch as this, while under *my* care ! No ! no ! We will set him on his legs, Waif, in less than a fortnight. Then he will pay his doctor's bill, walk off with a huge appetite, and we shall see him no more."

Her face, over which every shade of hope and fear had passed while she listened, looked very grave and earnest now.

" Am I to nurse him, Patron ? " said she ; " we can keep him safe and quiet in here, and I can see after his wants while you attend to the people that come to consult you, patients and "—

" Fools "— added the old man. " Fools, who are yet so wise in their folly as to purchase ease of mind at a price they would grudge for health of body. It's a worse trade, Waif, to set a broken leg than to heal a broken heart. We want skill, learning, splints, bandages, and anatomy for the one, but a little cunning and a bold guess will answer all purposes for the other. There are many men and more women who would laugh in my face if I told them their head was a workshop and their heart a pump ; yet they can believe the

whole of their future life is contained in a pack of cards. You and I, Waif, have thriven well in a world of fools—and the fools thrive too—why, I know not. The wisest people on earth are *your* people, but they have never prospered. Is it best to be true, simple, honest? I cannot answer —I have never tried."

"I will do everything you tell me," persisted Waif, taking for granted the permission she was so eager to obtain. "I can creep about the chamber just like a mouse; I never want to sleep, nor eat, nor drink, nor go out into the filthy muddy streets. I know every phial in the surgery as well as yourself. Hand him over to me, Patron, and I will promise to bring him through."

He eyed her narrowly, and she seemed conscious of his scrutiny, for she turned her head away and busied herself in adjustment of the bedclothes. Then he laughed a little mocking laugh, and proceeded to give directions for the treatment of their patient.

"You must watch him," he insisted, and though she muttered, "You needn't tell me that!" finished his say without noticing the interruption. "You must watch him narrowly; if he wakes, give him one more spoonful of the cordial; if he is restless after that, come to me. If he wanders in his sleep, mark every word he utters, and remember it. Such drivellings are not of the slightest importance, but interesting, very interesting, in a medical point of view. Good-night, Waif. Do exactly as I bid you,

and if all goes well do not wake me till sunrise."

Then he trimmed the lamp, listened at the lattice, and retired, leaving the girl alone with her patient.

How quiet she sat! moving not so much as a finger, with her large dark eyes fixed on the floor, and her thoughts like restless sea-birds, flying here, there, everywhere; now skimming the Past, now soaring into the Future, finally gathering out of all quarters to settle themselves on the Present. From the moment when Katerfelto, or the Patron, as she called him, left the room, she seemed to have entered on a new life, to have risen in her own esteem, to have accepted responsibilities of which she was proud, to have become a gentler, fairer, softer being, more susceptible to pleasure and to pain. She only knew there was a great change; she did not know that she was passing into Fairy Land by the gate through which there is no return.

Behind her lay rugged mountain and dreary moor, paths that soil and blister weary feet, barren uplands yielding scanty harvest in return for daily toil, a scorching sun, a drenching rain, mocking winds that whirl and buffet and moan. Before her opened the dazzling vistas of a magic region: gleaming rivers, golden skies, velvet lawns fretted with gems, bending flowers laden with perfume; glade and thicket, field and forest bathed in glows of unearthly beauty, rich in tints of unearthly splendour, teeming with fruits of unearthly hues. Would she not enter in and

rest? Would she not reach forth her hand to gather and smell and taste? Had she not wild longings, vague curiosity, unreasonable daring? Was she not a woman to the core? How could she tell that the Fairy Land was a glamour, the lustre a delusion, the beauty a snare? that serpents were coiling in the grass, that poison lurked in the flowers, that the fruits turned to dust and ashes on the lip? How could she foresee the time when she would yearn and strive and pray to get back to the outer world? In vain! Those who have once passed its gate and tasted the fruits in that fairy garden have to do with middle earth no more. Their phantoms may indeed remain among us, but themselves are far away in the enchanted country, pacing their weary round without a respite, fulfilling their endless penance in the listless apathy of despair.

Once the sleeping man turned with a low, deep sigh of comfort, as in relief from pain. Waif's dark eyes gleamed on him with glances of unspeakable tenderness and admiration. How noble he looked lying there in his wounds, like a dead prince! How graceful was the recumbent form; how luxuriant the dark brown hair escaped from its black riband to wander over the pillow; how white and shapely the strong hand opened loosely on the coverlet! This, then, was what they called a gentleman. She had seen gentlemen in the streets, or when they came to consult the Patron, but never under such favourable conditions for examination as now. What was *she* in comparison? She, the drudge of a charla-

tan, half-quack, half-conjurer? How could there be anything in common between them? She stirred uneasily in her chair, rose, crept to the bedside, and laid her slim, dusky hand by the side of his.

Waif's hands, in spite of hard work and hard weather, were beautiful with the beauty of her race; long, lithe, and delicate; the slender fingers and filbert-shaped nails concealed a vigour of grasp and tenacity denied to the broad, coarse fist of many a powerful man. She smiled as she compared them with those of the sleeping patient; and her smile grew brighter while she reflected that she was herself the superior in those advantages of birth she so esteemed in him. Yes, the oldest blood in England seemed a mere puddle compared with hers. Where was the English gentleman who could trace his pedigree back for a hundred generations without break or blemish, to ancestors who had served the Pharaohs and set taskwork for the Jews, who even in that remote time boasted themselves lineal descendants of an illustrious line that was only lost with every other record of history in the dim obscurity of the past?

All this Waif had learned beneath the stars, on Bagshot Heath or Barnes Common, sitting over the camp-fires in the steam of the camp-kettles, filled with spoils from neighbouring hen-roosts, stolen by the high-born patriarchs and princes of her tribe.

But she was a good nurse, notwithstanding her royal descent and barbarian bringing-up.

Twenty times during the night she smoothed her patient's pillows and straightened his bed-clothes, watching with experienced eye and ear for symptoms of weakness or relapse. Never once did she relax her vigilance, nor so much as relieve her slender, supple form by leaning back in her chair. Unlike most watchers, for her the minutes seemed to fly on golden wings, and when the grey light of dawn began to steal through the shutter, dulling the lamp still burning in that sick-chamber, she could have reproached the summer morning for coming so soon.

Yet it had been a long night to Waif in fact, if not in appearance. Those watchful hours had brought for her the great change that comes once in a lifetime. An ancient philosopher compared our terrestrial career to the letter Y. He has been quoted till we are tired of him, but none the less must we acknowledge the force of his illustration. As we travel along the road we must needs arrive, some in the morning, some in the middle of the day, some (and these last are much to be pitied) not till the afternoon, at a point where two paths branch out in different directions. There is a guide-post indeed, but it stands so high above our heads that we seldom look at it, choosing rather to trust our passions and inclinations for directions on the way. So we turn to right or left as nature, habit, or convenience prompts us, and on the turn thus taken depends our future journey, and the hope of ever reaching home.

It was broad day when John Garnet woke and

tried to sit up in bed. "Where am I?" was his first exclamation, rubbing his eyes with the hand his bandages left free. "And why am I trussed up like a fowl that's been skewered? Ah! I remember now. I *have* been skewered, and you've been nursing me, my pretty maid. I fear I have given you a vast deal of trouble and shall give you more before I can stand up."

She bent over him like a mother over her child. It was such happiness to protect and soothe him, to feel that he might even owe his life to her.

"Do not try to move yet," said she; "you are safe and in good hands. The longer you stay with us the better we shall be pleased."

"Will you nurse me?" he asked gaily, unconscious of the tremble that ran through her frame, while she bowed her head in answer.

"Then I don't care how long it is!" he laughed. "With such a pretty nurse I should like never to get well!"

The blood flew to her face, reddening brow and temples, with a blush of pride and exquisite pleasure, rather than of resentment or shame.

CHAPTER IV

THE OLD STORY

KATERFELTO'S business seemed to bring him in contact with persons of every class and character. Men and women were coming to the surgery at all hours of the day and night; the former generally armed, the latter sometimes masked, all muffled in cloaks or riding-hoods, as if their purpose necessitated secrecy and disguise. It did not escape John Garnet's observation, lying idle on his sick-bed, that the conversations he overheard were carried on in a subdued voice, and that everything connected with the Doctor's house in Deadman's Alley seemed tainted with a breath of mystery, suspicion, and intrigue.

To this effect he unburthened his mind while watching Waif's stealthy movements as she arranged the room some few mornings after his arrival, and insisted by word and gesture on the necessity of his lying perfectly still if he wanted to get well.

"Waif," said he, in that pleasant, careless voice which had already taught the girl's eye to brighten and her heart to leap, "is the Patron a wizard, a Jacobite agent, a second Guy Fawkes, or only a great prince in disguise? Why is everything in this house, even to laying the plates for dinner, done with secrecy and caution? Why does nobody speak but in whispers, and why is each succeeding visitor kept waiting in the passage till his predecessor has been dismissed? Why do the ladies come here on foot, my pretty lass, and what does it all mean?"

"Don't call me that!" she exclaimed impatiently. "I'm *not* a pretty lass! It's the way you would speak to a milkmaid. Call me Waif."

"Waif," he repeated. "There's another mystery. Who ever heard of a girl like you being called Waif? Who gave you that name? Not that you ever had godfathers or godmothers, I suppose. But where did you get it, and how?"

"The Patron has called me Waif ever since I was a little child," said she simply. "I was known as Thyra with our own people, but of course, when he bought me, he was bound to change my name."

"Bought you!" John Garnet gasped for breath and gave such a bounce among the bedclothes as to loosen his bandages. Her clever fingers readjusted them without delay.

"Bought me," she repeated, "and took me away with him the same day. I cried to leave Fin and old Broomstick, but to be sure I was very little and it was very cold."

"Oh! you cried to leave Fin and old Broom-

stick," said he in undisguised astonishment. "May I ask who they were?"

"Fin was one of our own lads," she answered; "they said I was to be his wife when we grew up. I don't think I minded leaving Fin so much, but Broomstick had carried me ever since I was born, and my heart was sore to wish the poor old donkey good-bye."

"But how could all this be done against your will?" continued John Garnet.

"I had no will one way nor the other," she answered. "Of course, when I was paid for, he might do as he chose. I felt the change at first, but I liked it well enough after a time. I am very glad of it now."

This last with her face turned away, and in a whisper that escaped his notice.

"Was he good to you?" asked the other, feeling his free British instincts sadly outraged by the girl's disclosures. "If he wasn't, he ought to have his neck wrung!"

"Oh yes!" she replied eagerly, but with a shrinking look in her bright black eyes. "I have nothing to complain of from the Patron. Nothing! I hated my shoes at first, and eating with a knife and fork; but the Patron gave me beautiful clothes, and ornaments of gold, real gold. I soon learned to like being well-dressed, and after a time I didn't so much mind sleeping under a roof. But oh! how I missed the lights in the sky! I used to wake up in the night crying, because I thought they had gone out for ever, and I should see them shining no more."

"But what on earth did he want you for?" was the natural inquiry. "What did he do with you after he bought and carried you away?"

"We didn't always live here," she answered. "We do not always live here now. At first, the Patron took me about all over the country. I daresay I know a good many more places than you do. We went to every fair and merry-making down in the West, as far as the Land's End. It must be a very dark night for me to lose my way on Dartmoor, or anywhere in the valley of the Exe, or among the coombs between Badgeworthy water and Taunton town. That was the first place I danced at to please the people in the fair. The Patron gave me this gold collar next morning, and I've worn it ever since. Would you like me to dance for you now, or sing? Or shall I tell you your fortune? I'll do anything to please you. Only say what it shall be."

The shy and pleading glance that accompanied this accommodating avowal would have melted a harder heart than John Garnet's.

"Tell me of yourself," was his answer; "that pleases me more than anything else you can talk about."

Her bright smile revealed a dazzling row of teeth. "There is not much to tell," said she. "We made money, and we spent money. Sometimes we went to the races, and the Patron used to come in to supper with his pockets full of gold. Sometimes the people laughed at us, and then we never stayed till nightfall. Once—it was at Devizes—they hooted us out of the town; a man

threw a stone at me which struck me on the shoulder. It bled a good deal. Look, there's the mark!"

She pulled her dress down and revealed a cicatrice on a shape that would have made a model for a sculptor. "I flew at him!" she continued, with a fierce glitter in her eyes, "and drew my knife. I would have stabbed him, but the Patron pulled me away. I should like to see that man again. I should know his face among ten thousand, and I would kill him wherever we met. Then we came here, and the Patron left off travelling so much. He says he began at the wrong end, and went to seek the fools, instead of letting the fools come and seek him. I used to think I liked moving about better than always sticking in the same place, but I don't think so now."

"And the fools that come so readily to seek the Patron," asked John Garnet—"what sort of fools are these?"

"The wisest sort," answered the girl. "Many a time I have heard him say that those who come for information begin by telling him all they want to know. The Patron never seems to listen, but his ears are very sharp. Besides, he can always find out things in a hundred ways, watching the fire and the stars, or reading the cards. The last is the easiest, only they sometimes come up wrong, but the stars *never* deceive."

She spoke with implicit faith. For this girl there was an inscrutable power that ruled supreme over all earthly fortunes, and dominated all mortal efforts. She called it Fate, and believed that its

decrees were revealed in the cracklings of a wood fire, the combinations on a table of numerals, the presence of the knave of spades in a hand of diamonds, no less than in those tablets of fire that her ancestors had studied, when the Pyramids were as yet unfinished, when the Chaldæan was still learning the alphabet of that wondrous language he discovered in the stars of heaven.

"Then the Patron is a fortune-teller?" continued John Garnet, looking with undisguised admiration in his companion's face. "I thought he was a doctor—I am sure he has doctored me to some purpose. I feel as if I should be out of bed to-morrow, and in the saddle next day. Perhaps it's your nursing, pretty Waif; but I seem to get stronger every hour."

It was a tell-tale face, and changed colour often under the clear, swarthy skin. John Garnet, however (and perhaps this was why women liked him well), detected but slowly the interest he created in the opposite sex; and Waif might have blushed till she was scarlet before he found out the truth, had she not pressed both hands to her bosom with a gesture of pain, and exclaimed, in a choking voice—

"Then you will go away, and I shall never see you again!"

He glanced sharply in her face. The black eyes were fixed and tearless, but there was a world of patient, hopeless sorrow in their gaze; and through John Garnet's heart ran a thrill of something sweeter and keener than pity—something not far removed from love.

"Waif," said he, in the kind, mellow tones she knew so well—"Waif, my pretty maid, shall you be sorry when I have to go away?"

She looked straight in his eyes while he could have counted ten. Then over her dark, delicate face came, as it were, a ripple, that told how deeply she was moved. One instant her slender figure waved like a willow in the wind, the next she had fallen forward on her knees, clasping his hand to her lips and forehead, while she wept convulsively; but, before he had recovered his astonishment sufficiently to soothe her with word or caress, she leaped to her feet, and glided like a phantom from the room.

"Here's a coil!" said John Garnet to himself, making an abortive effort to rise that sufficiently convinced him he had overrated his strength.

"Why the devil couldn't I let her go on, and keep my own foolish tongue between my teeth? It's always the way with me. I speak, and then I'm sorry for it. Am I sorry for it now? I doubt if I am. She's the prettiest lass, for all her tawny skin, I've seen since I came out of the North; and there's no harm done after all. I wonder how long I shall be kept lying here? A week more, at least. Say a week. The time will pass all the quicker with this gipsy beauty to talk to; and if she *do* care for me a little more than is good for her, why I suppose she can't help it. No more can I. What eyes she has, and what hair! I could find it in my heart to wish she was not quite so handsome; but that's not my fault. Thyra's a pretty name, though

outlandish—much better than Waif. I shall call her Thyra when she comes back. It won't be long first, I'll wager a guinea!"

But he would have lost his guinea. Noon passed, and afternoon, and day drew to an end, but brought no Waif with its lengthening shadows. When his usual supper-time arrived he began to grow fretful and impatient, as much perhaps from cravings of the stomach as the heart. A step in the passage, the bump of a tray against his door, restored him to good-humour; but it was with a feeling of disappointment, keen enough to dull the vigorous appetite of convalescence, that he saw the skull-cap and velvet gown of his host, instead of Waif with her scarlet draperies and jetty gold-studded hair. When a girl has told a man she likes him, he always wants to hear the avowal again.

"My young friend," said Katerfelto, in the low grave voice to which he owed so much of his influence, "I have brought you to eat and drink: food plain and nourishing, drink that shall restore and not inflame. The tongue is clean, the eye clear, the pulse full, if a little irregular. My coming into the room suddenly flurried you, no doubt. If you go on well through the night, to-morrow I shall pronounce you convalescent. I never speak without being sure. When Constantine Katerfelto uses the word 'convalescent,' a patient may order his boots to be blacked and his spurs cleaned."

"You've brought me through right well, Doctor," replied John Garnet, glancing at the

door, "you and Waif together. You must give the nurse some of the credit! She's been very careful and attentive. I think she has hardly left me for an hour at a time, till—till to-day."

How differently thirty and sixty look upon the absence of eighteen!

"Waif's a good girl," answered the Doctor coolly; "and, for a mere child, shows a fair amount of intelligence. I am glad you are satisfied with her."

"She—she's not ill to-day, I hope?" hazarded the patient, eating, however, heartily enough, notwithstanding the anxiety to be inferred from his inquiry.

"Ah!" was the answer; "you know very little of Waif, or you would scarcely ask such a question. None of her race are ever ill, any more than the beast of prey. They die, indeed, but it is like the wolf and the jackal, in some forest den. Skill, science, experience, are of no avail. It's in the blood—nothing can cure them when they have once lain down. I've tried it a score of times, and failed."

"Is she a thoroughbred gipsy?" he asked, for it was pleasant to talk of her, even to this unsympathising old man.

"As the Queen of Sheba," assented the other. "Some day, perhaps, when we are better acquainted, I may tell you more of her history; but I give not my friendship lightly," he added, with a scrutinising glance from his shining grey eyes; "it is offered only to those who owe me, or to whom I owe, a heavy debt of gratitude."

"I am sure I ought to be grateful to you," said John Garnet, "and so I am; but I can do nothing to prove it till you get me off this bed, and out of this room. Then, Doctor, speak up boldly. Say what you want, and I am your man!"

The other laughed a noiseless laugh, peculiar to himself. "You owe me but little as yet," said he; "perhaps you may live to be deeper in my debt than for the healing of a scratch. Not that I mean to say the scratch was a trifling one. I tell you honestly, many a surgeon would have given your case up as hopeless; and you ought to be thankful, if you young men ever *are* thankful, that you fell into my hands. No; for a bold, enterprising fellow, in the prime of life and strength, whose fingers, as I guess, close round his hilt pretty readily, I might do something better than stop a hole in the side. There are paths to fortune, plenty of them, for men who look upward and onward, steep it may be, and leading through miry places, not seldom slippery with blood. To a bold spirit this is half the charm! You are lying here, unable to leave your bed to-day; but do you not long for the time when you shall be riding wild horses, pledging lawless healths, drinking, dicing, and brawling once more? When the frost is bitter, and the earth white with snow, and the robin hops to your window for crumbs, do you not look forward to the opening spring, the soft south wind, the coming of the blackbird at last?"

A look of intelligence passed between them,

and the sick man's eye brightened. It was the password of a losing, nay, of a ruined cause. The handful of Jacobites remaining in England had not yet relinquished all hope of his return, who had proved indeed a bird of ill-omen, blacker than night, to those whose loyalty waged life and lands on his behalf.

"Nay, Doctor," said the other, with a flush of pride on his face, "the blackbird's whistle has cost us simply all we had, but not one of us ever complained; we bought defeat too dear."

"I know you, John Garnet," answered Katerfelto. "You come of a trusty race."

"Know me!" repeated the other. "How did you find me out? I would have told you without hesitation, but you never asked my name—no more did Waif."

"I know a great many things," replied the charlatan. "In many ways you could not understand, unless you had studied, as I have, the hidden mysteries of Heaven and Earth, and of places under the Earth. I know that the Garnets lost titles and lands for the—for the Blackbird—we will say. I know that the last of them would leap from that bed, bandages and all, to burn powder and draw steel if the yellow beak did but so much as whistle from its garden in the South."

"You learned all that in the *Annual Register* or the *North Briton*," said John Garnet proudly; "but how did you guess I belonged to the family who have been so loyal, so constant, and proved themselves such—fools?"

Katerfelto smiled. "Fools," he replied, "are

my special study. As the worm feeds the blackbird, so the fool feeds the philosopher. You are no fool notwithstanding, and yet I know all about you. There was a supper-party t'other night—a jest—an altercation—a duel—without witnesses —without witnesses, mark you. When a man is killed under those circumstances, the law sometimes brings it in—murder!"

John Garnet turned pale. The truth of his host's surmises affected him no less than the consideration of the danger he had incurred. It did not strike him that Katerfelto's guesses, however shrewd, were the mere offspring of analogy and observation. A wounded man at midnight inferred an after-supper brawl, while the fact of his staggering into Deadman's Alley faint from loss of blood, alone and unassisted, argued the absence of seconds, one of whom would doubtless have conveyed his principal to a place of safety, while the identity of that principal must long since have become the talk of this town.

"You know everything," he murmured,— "everything. I wish you could tell me whether the poor fellow I ran through the brisket is alive."

For reasons of his own the charlatan was anxious to impress his patient with a conviction of his powerful character and superior intelligence.

"Not so," said he, with an air of extreme frankness. "I have no knowledge, for I have taken no trouble to learn. If I can spare the time to-night, when the moon goes down, I will set those to work who shall bring me all the

information I require in less than forty-eight hours."

John Garnet, though scarcely a model Christian, was a good Catholic. He crossed himself and faltered a feeble protest against the employment of evil spirits or unorthodox powers of the air.

"I had rather not get well at all," said he, "than be cured by magic or witchcraft! I would leave the house this minute if I believed you were more than a doctor! I'll wager a fair stake and risk my life any day, but I won't sit down to play for my soul!"

"Your soul!" echoed Katerfelto, with his characteristic laugh. "My young friend, what should I do with your soul if I won it? My concern is with men's bodies, their energies, their courage, and their intellect. I shall set you on your legs in a week, and you can carry your soul about with you, if you have one, wherever you like. In the meantime keep quiet, take your medicine, drugs of the veriest earth — earthy; eat your food and drink your posset, prepared by no fairy hands, but those of a woman, real flesh and blood, with a human temper, worse, I daresay, than that of many average fiends, and so get well. In a few days I will talk to you again on matters of business to our mutual advantage. Meantime I relegate you once more to the care of Waif."

His spirits rose at once, and he bade the charlatan good-night with an excess of cordiality not lost on that shrewd observer, who was as good as his word, for his voice could be heard in the passage

bidding Waif hasten her housework and watch by the patient till he slept, a mandate the gipsy girl obeyed to the letter, returning without delay to her former post, but taking up a station in the obscurity where John Garnet could not see her face. Neither did she vouchsafe a syllable of greeting or explanation, so that the patient felt uncomfortably hurt and perplexed.

"Have I offended you?" he asked at length in a humble tone, contrasting piteously with the coldness of that in which she replied.

"Who am I, to be offended? My only business is to obey. The Patron bids me watch here till you sleep."

So he shut his eyes, yet not too tight, and scanned her the while covertly beneath their lids, thus detecting on her face, when she turned it towards him, a look of tender wistful longing, that told only too plainly the secret of her love.

Then he drew a deep breath of relief and contentment, satisfied he would rise a winner from the unequal game, and so fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER V

A CHARLATAN

IN the surgery Katerfelto began to prepare for the reception of his visitors. Standing at a bright little mirror, he was soon immersed in the task. A spot of carmine on the cheek-bones, a line or two of paint round the mouth, about the eyes, and across the forehead, added a score of years to his appearance and made him look a man of eighty. A flowing white beard, in which his own grey tresses mingled freely, and a black cloak bordered with crimson, drawn over the velvet gown, completed his equipment. Surveying the whole in his glass, he drew himself up with something of the confidence a knight must have felt when armed from head to heel. "Come one, come all," he seemed to say; "I am a match for the best of you, and profitable as is the victory, I am not sure but the real pleasure consists in the strife!"—

The plot thickened with nightfall. He was hardly ready before a cautious tap made itself heard at the street door. Waif, watching her patient's slumbers, flew to admit the visitor, and was at her post again ere he had time to pay a single compliment on her good looks.

In his own opinion this gentleman was a consummate judge of such matters. On the points of a horse, or a woman, he held no man so well qualified to give an opinion, and indeed had spent the greater part of his fortune in researches after speed and beauty. His accomplishments were those of his time and class. A better and bolder card-player than Lord Bellinger never held a trump. He cracked his bottle like an honest fellow without flinching, played tennis, danced a minuet to admiration, bowed and took snuff with inimitable grace, fenced beautifully, swore fearfully, and corrupted his mother tongue into a jargon only intelligible at Ranelagh or the Cocoa Tree.

When the cloak was thrown open in which this paragon was enveloped, Katerfelto did not fail to recognise in that worn, handsome face and attenuated form the most frequent and productive of his customers.

"Your lordship is welcome," said the charlatan with gracious dignity. "How liable is our poor glimmering of human science to error; the mistake of a decimal caused me to expect you nearly an hour ago."

"What! You knew it?" replied the other, not without an oath. "Why, Katerfelto, you know everything! Yes, here I am. It's not very difficult to guess why. Have you found out anything more? Who is she? And what is she? How much longer am I to go on toasting her without so much as knowing her name; haunted by those clear, cold eyes, that proud,

delicate face, that queenly shape and air? Tell me all about her, now at once! Here! I've brought you the stuff in a bag. Look at it, man. Does it make your eyes shine and your mouth water? It cost me six hours' work to get that little purse together last night at the Cocoa Tree. Never were such cards! Never *was* such luck!"

"Fortune is a woman," answered the other. "Like all women, coy to be wooed, but grateful to be won."

"She hath played me more slippery tricks than I choose to count," laughed his lordship. "It may be that I solicit her too often, and trust her too fondly. Last night she did me a rare jade's turn! Look ye here, man; I had won a cool four thousand at picquet, and St. Leger wanted to leave off. I was always too strong for him at picquet. Well, sir, four thousand was no use to me, but eight would have taken my lady's diamonds out of pawn, and I offered him one more chance, double or quits."

"I know you did," observed Katerfelto with the utmost effrontery, "and left off quits; I wish I had been at your lordship's elbow."

"I wish you had!" replied the other; "for I believe you are the devil himself, or in close league with him. However, I did not come here to prate about my luck, and I have little time to waste; my lady thinks I am at Ranelagh. She's to meet me there later. Now business is business, my good friend; what have you done for me?"

"Little, and yet enough," answered the other.

"You will meet somebody at Ranelagh to-night; you are to be wary and cautious. Do not seem to recognise her till you find her unattended. You may then speak three words, no more. It is her express stipulation. They will be answered in due time. She goes to Ranelagh early and remains only an hour."

"Then I had better be off!" exclaimed his lordship, pressing a purse into Katerfelto's hand. "What! are you so ceremonious? Must you needs come to the door yourself? Where's the pretty gipsy lass? I saw her not ten minutes ago. I say, Katerfelto, if ever you sell her back into bondage, let me have the refusal. By Jupiter! if I was to put that girl into velvet and brocade I could take the town by storm."

"Your lordship does her too much honour," answered Katerfelto, bowing profoundly while he opened the door, but there was a malicious twinkle in his eye, and a curl of scorn about the corners of his mouth, to belie the outward show of deference with which he dismissed his visitor.

The latter had been gone but a few minutes ere a sedan-chair was set down at the end of Deadman's Alley, and a lady closely veiled, carrying a riding-mask, not over her face, but in her hand, alighted with some trepidation, peering up and down the passage, as if fearful of being observed, while she made for the red lamp in Katerfelto's window. This visitor was also admitted after a little cautious tap, but, unlike her predecessor, looked with scorn rather than admiration on Waif's dark locks and flashing

glances. "Tell the Doctor, child," said she, "that I am not to be disturbed while I consult him; and beware of eavesdropping. I do not choose to share my secrets with a waiting-maid, for all her saucy looks and sallow skin!"

Waif scarcely heard and certainly did not heed, for her heart was in the sick-chamber with John Garnet, whither her agile body lost no time in following it.

"Your ladyship is early," said Katerfelto, with an obeisance courtly but not subservient. "Ranelagh need wait the less impatiently for its fairest ornament."

"La, Doctor!" was the answer, "who could have told you I was going to Ranelagh? I protest you know everything. My lord thinks I am there now."

"My lord will be there as surely as my lady," answered the other. "But it was not to learn his lordship's movements that your ladyship came here!"

"Fie, Doctor!" she replied; "what woman of fashion cares to know the doings of a husband? I have a crow to pluck with you. Do you remember what you promised me the last time I was here?"

"Triumphs by the hundred," said he; "compliments by the thousand; conquests and flatteries innumerable. Better than these, a run of luck with the cards that should last a week."

"And I wore it out in a night," she complained. "Whist, ombre, picquet, and three-card loo, I have never risen a winner but once since I came

here last. You dare not deceive me, Doctor; nay, you would not deceive a woman, I am sure. Can you—couldn't you put me in the way of winning a game or two? I protest I shall have to pawn my diamonds else."

No one knew better than the Doctor that this expedient had been resorted to long ago, and her ladyship was at present wearing paste; but he did not say so.

"Are you willing to learn?" he asked, with his quiet sarcastic smile. "An hour's practice every day for ten days would make your ladyship independent of chance and all its fluctuations. Chance, forsooth! there's no such thing. Do you think I trust to chance when I direct your actions and forecast your future? Fate is the ruling power of the universe; but science and skill, the quick brain and the ready hand—these may control Fate."

On a weak mind so high-sounding a sentence, meaning nothing, took no small effect. She blushed, she simpered, she bit her lips, she hesitated.

"I should like it prodigiously," she said, with a nervous laugh, "if—if it wasn't dishonest, you know; and—and if it couldn't be found out!"

He took a pack of cards from a drawer. "Observe my fingers," he began, but she interrupted him with a faint scream.

"Not now!" she exclaimed; "some other time, Doctor. I'm so frightened! I'm sure I heard somebody at the door. It *is* cheating, you know. Besides, I must be at Ranelagh in an

hour, and I have to dress, all but my head,—that was done this morning. I wish I hadn't come. La! I know I could never find courage. Let me out, please. This is between ourselves, of course. Shall I find you to-morrow night at the same time?"

Assuring her that he never left his post, Katerfelto ushered her ladyship with much ceremony to the door, which was opened by Waif, on whom the departing visitor found nothing better to bestow than a look of supreme indifference and scorn.

Not so the next comer. Hardly had the chairmen, who winked at each other as they took up their precious burden, moved a dozen paces, when a heavy step was heard in Deadman's Alley, and a burly figure, that seemed to ignore all considerations of secrecy and disguise, stopped at Katerfelto's door to thump till it shook again.

Undoing the fastening, hastily as she might, Waif found herself confronted by a stout middle-aged person, in a rusty black riding-suit, who looked as if he had been taking hasty refreshment, washed down by strong potations, as indeed was the case.

Parson Gale — for it was none other — had ridden post from Exmoor to London on receiving the news of his brother's death in a midnight brawl. Arrived in the metropolis, he lost no time in communicating with the officers of justice; and, from the particulars thus furnished, satisfied himself that the affray took place without witnesses, and that the survivor had escaped. The

Parson swore a great oath that he would avenge the crime, and if the perpetrator was above ground, hunt him down to death. His difficulty was to find out where John Garnet lay concealed. Every day, and all day long, he pursued his inquiries without success. Tired and hungry, while sitting at his tavern supper he chanced to hear Katerfelto spoken of as a cunning man, for whom there were no secrets in this world or the next; and having ascertained the locality of Deadman's Alley, finished his bottle, and started without delay on his search.

The apparition of Waif, in answer to his summons, may have surprised him a little; but when a pretty lass was in question, Parson Gale was never at a loss; he recovered his astonishment in time to chuck her under the chin, and bestow on her a most unwelcome caress. The girl's eyes glittered, and her lithe fingers stole to the knife at her girdle. He caught her by the wrist, and kissed her again. She disengaged herself with one dexterous twirl, and pushed rather than ushered this unwelcome admirer into the presence of Katerfelto; muttering, in her own outlandish tongue, something that sounded less like a blessing than a curse.

When roused to wrath, it was her nature to resent an insult or an injury on the spot; but if immediate retaliation seemed impossible, to wait for an opportunity with untiring patience, not to be diverted from its purpose by any considerations of clemency or forgiveness.

"If I can learn something about *you*," she

thought, "I shall know when and where to strike. Before our reckoning is over, you will wish your lips had been seared with a red-hot iron, rather than laid to mine against my will!" Then, casting one loving look towards the chamber in which John Garnet was sleeping, she took up her post at the door of the surgery, and listened eagerly to the conversation within.

"I'm a plain man, Doctor," began Parson Gale, in his rough, frank tones. "I speak the truth mostly myself, and expect others will speak it to me. Now, I am told that you know more, good and bad, than ever another person in this great wicked town. That's what brought me here."

Katerfelto nodded gravely. "Good and bad," said he, "are relative terms. Knowledge cannot of itself be evil, whether it be gleaned from the crowded footway or the solitary moor. Wisdom crieth aloud, could we but hear her, from the dome of St. Paul's no less than from the purple outline of the Quantock Hills and the brown ridge under Dunkerry Beacon."

The mention of these familiar places startled his listener; and Katerfelto, who had already detected the kindly West-country accent, did not fail to notice his surprise.

"I believe you *are* a conjurer," said the Parson, "as sure as I am not! Well—if you can tell me where I came from, perhaps you will tell me what I came for."

The charlatan smiled. "You wish to learn something very near your heart," said he, watching the other's countenance. "Not quite the

nearest and dearest of all! yet a matter of great importance. A matter of life and death."

For a bow drawn at a venture, it was a good shot, and the arrow reached its mark.

"That's enough!" exclaimed the Parson. "You're the man to tell me what I want. Name your price. 'Tis blood-money, and I'm not going to stand for a guinea one way or the other!"

"Justice must be done first!" said Katerfelto with exceeding gravity. "Let me hear your own tale in your own words, and rely on my help."

Thus encouraged, the Parson embarked on a narrative of his brother's duel, but little exaggerated, nor indeed very different from the facts set forth above, interspersing his account with dire threats of vengeance and solemn oaths —whereat Waif's blood ran cold—that he would take no rest till he had discovered and hunted down the perpetrator of this *murder*, as he persisted in calling it, to the death!

Listening at the keyhole, she lost not a syllable of their conversation, and the gipsy-girl vowed in her heart to come between the avenger and his victim, ay, even though she must steep her hands in blood, and swing for it on Tyburn tree.

Little by little Katerfelto gathered enough from Parson Gale's repetitions, threats, and assertions to feel sure that his patient in the next room was the individual whom the visitor wished to identify and bring to justice. In his plotting brain such a complication was simply a problem to be solved, a sum to be worked out, a plot to

be elaborated for his own advantage. With a gravity not lost on the West-country parson, who, for all his mother-wit, felt overawed by the other's assumption of superior intelligence, he promised to furnish the information required as soon as he should himself have consulted those spiritual intelligences he held at command.

"You shall come again when the moon is full," said he, accepting the broad pieces which his visitor thrust on him clumsily enough. "Ere then I shall discover his hiding-place, though he have taken refuge forty fathoms deep below the sea. But, mark you—I am not a man of blood, and I make no promise to deliver him into your hand."

Again Waif's fingers stole to her knife, while the Parson's savage laugh grated on her ear.

"Show me where the deer is harboured," said he, passing into the street. "I can do all the rest myself. The Lord have mercy on him, for I will not, when once I set him up to bay."

CHAPTER VI

MY LORD AND MY LADY

THEY occupied separate apartments now. There had been a time indeed when Lord and Lady Bellinger might have competed for the flitch of bacon at Dunmow, so well satisfied was each with the other, for weeks, nay months, after a marriage of vanity, with some little inclination. Was not my lord the best-dressed man at Court? Had not my lady the finest hand, the tightest waist, the loftiest headgear in London? Did not both exist only in the atmosphere of the great world, sacrificing to the airs and graces time, health, money, and reputation? Many tastes had they in common, some vices, not a few follies, prejudices, and frivolities; yet they soon began to differ, and after passing through the customary phases of disappointment, pique, resentment, and disgust, subsided into a sullen, stony indifference that was perhaps the most hopeless condition of all. Rarely meeting, except at meals or in the presence of others, they had few opportunities for quarrelling; when they did fall out, it is only fair to say that her ladyship usually took the initiative. Let us give her precedence, therefore, now.

AGAIN WAIF'S FINGERS STOLE TO THE KNIFE.

She is seldom stirring before noon. The sun is already at mid-heaven when she rings for her chocolate, sighs, yawns, thrusts on her small feet her smaller slippers, wriggles into a much-embroidered morning-gown, and totters across the room to look at herself in the glass. The face she sees therein reflected affords, alas! a history and a moral.

Its features are delicate, and the smile that has now become rigid from force of habit was once very flexible and sweet, but late hours and false excitement have scored premature wrinkles round the eyes, and the free use of paint has served to deaden and, as it were, rough-cast the surface of the skin. Lady Bellinger was never quite a pretty woman, though, with the advantages of dress, manner, and candle-light, she could hold her own in general society against many a professed beauty, and counted her ballroom conquests in numbers that, if they did not satisfy her rapacity, were quite enough for her reputation. This borderland between good looks and an ordinary exterior is, perhaps, the most dangerous ground of all. Vanity is excited, but not gratified. Wit, vivacity, freedom of gesture and conversation are called in to supplement the charms that nature has left imperfect. The player grows more reckless as the game goes on, and at last no stake is thought too high to risk on a winning card.

The face she is studying wears a mournful expression to-day. Weary, perhaps, rather than dissatisfied, for she won twenty guineas last night

at ombre, and overheard Sir Hector Bellairs ask who she was; that refined young gentleman, a rising light at Newmarket and the Cocoa Tree, adding with an oath, "She has a game look about her, like a wild, thoroughbred mare!"

And yet, was it worth while, she pondered lazily, to tremble half an hour over the cards for twenty guineas? Were the pains lavished on dress and toilet to yield no higher triumph than Sir Hector's silly comparison, or the sneer with which it was received by the man he addressed? Harry St. Leger used to admire her once, at least he told her so, and now—he only smiled at Sir Hector's idle talk, and turned away to a little bread-and-butter miss, whose round blue eyes were becoming the rage of the town. What could men see to rave about in such chits as these? Why, the little creature was not even well-dressed, and had hardly so much as learned to ogle and handle a fan! Was it possible that innocence, simplicity, natural red and white, could presume to contend with such a position, such millinery, and such experiences as hers? Lady Bellinger sighed to think how she was thrown away. What depths there were in her loving heart that had never been fathomed; what passions in her mature womanhood that had never been aroused. Alas! those depths could have been baled out with a thimble; those passions, affections, caprices, call them what you will, were three parts simulated, and the fourth only skin-deep. Nevertheless, she esteemed herself a lovable woman, wasted and misunder-

stood. She had a headache, she had the spleen, the vapours. Ranelagh was very tiresome last night. The lights still danced before her eyes, the hum of conversation still vibrated in her ears. Resting her heavy head on the dressing-table, she seemed to live the whole scene over again.

What a medley and confusion it was! Women with enormous head-dresses, wide hoops and high-heeled shoes, patched, powdered, painted, curtseying, smirking, and grimacing. "Your ladyship is vastly kind. Shall wait on you with pleasure. Not *real* di'monds, ma'am? I protest. I have it from the best authority. Fie! my lord, I thought you were more gallant. The earl, as I live. Come back from the grand tour with a wife! Whose wife? La! Sir Marmaduke, I vow you make me blush. The King hath had another interview with the favourite. Angry words, and post-horses ordered on the North road. Too good news to be true. Mistress Betty, you look charmingly. What conquests you must have made at the Bath. Here's the bishop! Madam, your humble servant"; and so on till the stream of nothings swelled into an unintelligible babble. And out of this concourse of so-called friends, this turmoil of so-called conversation, was there one form amongst the throng that could call the blood to her cheek, the light to her eye? One voice that fell sweetly on her ear, that woke an echo responsive in her heart? Yes, on reflection there was one—nay, there were two or three—half a dozen—a score—but it seemed that, of late, her charms had ceased to work, her glances to

fascinate. Ten compliments—she counted them on her fingers—made the sum total of her triumphs last night. Harry St. Leger devoted himself to the bread-and-butter hoyden. The handsome colonel had drunk too freely of claret to be available. The marquis was wholly taken up with Mistress Masters (who and what she was nobody knew!). Two or three snuff-taking admirers simpered, but did not commit themselves. The duke passed her with a bow, and it was a weary world!

As she came to this conclusion a tap at the door announced the arrival of her waiting-maid with the daily dish of chocolate. Contrary to custom, that demure person did not depart after she set it down.

"What is it, child?" asked Lady Bellinger, not very good-humouredly because of her reflections. "Speak up, and don't stand staring there as if you'd seen a ghost!"

"It's my lord," answered the waiting-maid, tossing her head in imitation of her mistress. "My lord bade me ask your ladyship if you were up, and if you could see him now directly, before he gets into his coach."

"My lord!" repeated his wife, in a tone of surprise that sufficiently attested the infrequency of such visits; "what can my lord want with me at this early hour? How am I looking, child? Quick! give me those drops off the chimney-piece—a clean cap, the one trimmed with pink, you fool! Put a touch of colour in my cheeks; I declare my face is like death. Draw that

window-curtain. Now you may tell him he can come in."

Lord Bellinger entered accordingly, dressed in great splendour, with cane, hat, and snuff-box in hand. Thus encumbered, he made shift, nevertheless, to take the tips of his wife's fingers and carry them to his lips, inquiring at the same time how her ladyship did, and whether she had slept well.

Her ladyship had not closed an eye, of course. She was feverish, poorly, and far from strong! Thus establishing a position of defence from the first.

"Zounds, madam!" exclaimed he, "so much the better—you will the more readily hear what I have to say."

My lord, to do him justice, was a good-tempered man enough, but this morning found him, for many reasons, in the worst of humours. Last night's gathering to him, no less than to his lady, had been replete with disappointment and vexation. Like many others, he attended Ranelagh with a variety of motives, among which pleasure, even in his own sense of the term, was perhaps the least engrossing. In the first place, he desired to show himself before the world accompanied by her ladyship, scandal having been busy with both their names of late, and "the town" telling each other significantly that "there must soon be a break-up in *that* establishment. My lady's goings-on, madam, I protest, are inexcusable, and my lord's extravagance, I have it from the best authority, really

beyond belief!" Therefore he thought well to appear in this public place prosperous, smiling, debonair, and on the best of terms with his wife.

Their exit, however, like their entrance, had been badly timed. They neither came nor went away together; and his own staunch ally, Harry St. Leger, who was also a professed admirer of Lady Bellinger, thought well to whisper in his ear, "Look ye, Fred, I never turn my back on a friend. If it must come to a smash, or a split, remember I stand fast by your lordship, sink or swim!" This was failure the first.

Then a great man, one of His Majesty's ministers, had informed him pretty roundly that the appointment he held at Court was not wholly a sinecure, and the time had come at which he must prove his loyalty by activity in the service of his King. That he was expected, in short, to proceed without delay to his own western county, of which he held the lieutenancy, there to carry out certain instructions, which he would receive next day at the minister's private residence in time to commence his journey the same afternoon. To a man for whom the pleasures of London were as the air he breathed, such a notification was like a sentence of death. Yet he dared not and could not refuse. This was trouble the second.

Many minor matters helped to swell the list of his annoyances. Bellairs gave him the latest news from Newmarket, to the effect that his own horse had been beaten in the great race by a head. Sir Horace had it from the best authority that his nominee would lose his election. One

neighbouring landowner in the West took him by the buttonhole to impart grievous suspicions of his lordship's steward, and another announced threatenings of disease amongst the sheep. Altogether, had it not been for the interview with his unknown charmer, promised by Katerfelto, he would have passed a sadly uncomfortable evening. This anticipation, however, was the drop that sweetened the whole cup, and when amongst the crowd he caught a glimpse of her graceful head and white shoulders, the world's malice, the minister's injunctions, the lost race, the dishonest steward, and the foot-rot in West Somerset were alike obliterated and forgotten.

He waited for some time, as directed, to accost her when alone. At last her cavalier crossed the room on some errand of his own, and he found his opportunity. "Madam," he whispered, "this is the moment for which I have languished ever since I had the privilege of beholding your face. Do not deny me now the happiness of hearing your voice."

She looked at him over her fan with large eyes of astonishment, in which, nevertheless, his experience detected a gleam of gratified vanity and amusement.

The fan was not withdrawn; the gloved hand that held it was taper and well-shaped — the rounded arm, white and beautiful. For the hundredth time Lord Bellinger believed that for the *first* time he was in love. Still she spoke not, and the moments were precious. Her cavalier would surely return without delay.

"Only tell me, I implore you," continued his lordship, "when we shall meet again. Where can I see you? Where can I write to you? In what way can I prove how ardently I long to cast myself at your feet — to serve you as the humblest of your slaves?"

He spoke in an agitated whisper; not without its effect—a softer expression shone in her eyes, and she lowered her fan to reply. Alas for the disillusion! instantaneous as it was complete!

The beautiful face might only be beautiful while the lips were closed; when they parted for speech they discovered black and unsightly teeth, separated by gaps and cavities neither few nor far between.

Quick as Lord Bellinger had been to fall in love, he was yet quicker to fall out. Ere a word could escape the lady, his cure had been effected, and with a dexterity that nothing but long practice could have ensured, he effected his retreat after a profound bow, a devoted glance, and a deep sigh.

"You are watched," he whispered, "so I will take my leave. Do not forget me. Soon we shall meet again."

Nevertheless he went home from Ranelagh feeling strongly at variance with the world in general and himself in particular.

Therefore his mood, notwithstanding his courteous entrance, was none of the most amiable when he paid this morning visit to her ladyship; therefore the tone in which he

couched it was little calculated to sweeten the unpalatable communication he had to make.

"Zounds, madam!" said his lordship, "you will the more readily hear what I have to say."

"Sure, you need not swear," she replied with frigid dignity. "No gentleman swears so early in the day."

He laughed, and continued more good-humouredly, "Your ladyship is very happy in town, are you not?"

"Your lordship must be a fool to ask such a question," she returned sharply. "If you neglected me less, you would know that in my position, and with my health, it is ridiculous to talk of being happy anywhere."

"And yet you look charmingly," continued her husband, scanning his own handsome person in the glass.

"Compared to faces which your lordship is in the habit of studying, mine is perhaps tolerably well-favoured," said she; "but nothing is so deceptive as one's appearance, and the air of this town is simply killing me by inches."

"Then it shall do murder no longer," he answered kindly. "I must leave for the West this very afternoon. My coach is waiting at the door to take me to the minister's. There is not a moment to be lost. It is the King's business; I suppose I ought to say, God bless him!"

"Well," she asked coldly, "what concern is that of mine?"

"Will you not come with me?" was his reply.

"We have been living separate lives too long. Perhaps each of us is better than the other thinks. Let us give it a trial and see if we cannot be happy together for a few weeks. We have been very uncomfortable apart for a good many years."

The tears were rising to her eyes. A kind word or a caress might have turned the balance even now; but it was his lordship's habit to assume carelessness of manner at the moment he was most interested, and instead of putting his arm round her waist, he busied himself adjusting cravat and ruffles in the glass. She felt and showed she was annoyed.

"I cannot leave town," she objected, "at a moment's notice. I wonder you can ask such a thing."

He looked in her face, disappointed and perhaps a little hurt.

"My lady," said he, "you're a puzzle!"

"My lord," said she, "you're a brute!"

CHAPTER VII

READY AND WILLING

THEY left town together notwithstanding; and although my lady altered her mind with every mile, now extolling her own sense of wifely duty, now bewailing her want of firmness and consistency, yet by the time she arrived at Hounslow, where they were to sleep, she had become reconciled to the society of her husband and her enforced journey to the West.

Such impressionable natures, from which emotion so easily passes away, enjoy at least this advantage—that one swallow makes for them an immediate summer, one glimpse of sunshine absorbs the memory of a month of storms.

Lord Bellinger, too, seemed in the highest spirits. Though his back must be turned on London and all its pleasures, his inconsistent nature could nevertheless find enjoyment in the mere act of change. Moreover, an hour before departure he had effected a loan of ready money from the accommodating Katerfelto, who waited

on him at his residence in Leicester Square, so completely disguised that Waif herself could hardly have recognised the respectable-looking citizen, in a brown suit and tie-wig, with ample cambric neckerchief concealing his long beard, who was ushered into his lordship's own apartment the moment he entered the house.

Lord Bellinger prided himself on the rapidity with which he transacted affairs of moment. No doubt his method was peculiar to himself.

"Katerfelto," said he, surveying the brown suit and tie-wig with grave curiosity, "I must have five hundred guineas in gold—now, in half an hour."

"Impossible, my lord," answered his visitor. "The time is too short; but you can have it in three-quarters."

"I like doing business with you," rejoined his lordship. "I never knew you *make* difficulties, nor found you unable to overcome them. I want the money directly, because I leave for the West this afternoon; but I consent to give you another quarter of an hour."

"Your lordship is vastly obliging," replied Katerfelto, with his peculiar smile. "I must trouble you to sign this little acknowledgment of the debt."

He drew a sheet of paper from his pocket, filled in certain blank spaces at the writing-table, and spread it before his lordship, with an air of excusing himself for the liberty he was obliged to take.

It was Lord Bellinger's boast that he never refused to draw his sword, drink his bottle, stake

his money, or sign his name; yet he made a wry face, and threw his pen into the inkstand with a curse after it had performed its office.

"I'm in a corner," said he, "or you would never have had me on such exorbitant terms. The King's business must not stand to cool. Hang it, man! if it had been my own, not a usurer in the town should have bit me like this!"

"Your lordship is in haste," answered Katerfelto; "and His Majesty's commands cannot be too speedily obeyed. I trust," he added carelessly, "there is no fear of disaffection in the West."

"State secrets!" answered Bellinger with a laugh. "How can I tell? I have not yet seen the minister. I go to him in an hour for final instructions."

Though Katerfelto was pondering deeply, his tone seemed lighter than usual, while he asked how the other had been amused the night before at Ranelagh; observing, "It is not your lordship's custom to leave an adventure half accomplished."

"No more of that!" exclaimed Lord Bellinger. "These are but the pastimes of a man who has little serious business on hand. Ambition, you know, is a specific for love. If I play my part well, Katerfelto, I have reason to believe that the next time I borrow your money it will be for an earl!"

"Good luck attend your lordship," answered the other, turning to depart. "As you are strong, be merciful."

My lord laughed, and snapped his fingers. "In half an hour," said he, "I shall have the lives and estates of some half-dozen gentlemen in my pocket. Intrigue, my good friend, is all very well; but for real sport, give me the great game. If your spiritual informants can travel so far, they will shortly bring you stirring news from the West."

"The vicissitudes of this material world affect me but little," answered Katerfelto, "save in so far as they aid my researches among the boundless regions of science and futurity. I am but a man of thought, while your lordship is a man of action. If, in my humble capacity, I can serve you, command me; and so I take my leave."

"He's an honest fellow enough, I protest," thought his lordship, as the door closed, "though his terms are confoundedly high! Money seems like everything else; if you want it, you must pay for it—through the nose too! But he's an honest fellow, no doubt."

The "honest fellow" meantime, plodding thoughtfully home to Deadman's Alley, busied himself in elaborate calculations of time, distance, expense, and other matters tending to subvert the minister's intention, and render nugatory Lord Bellinger's mission to the West.

He lost not a moment in visiting John Garnet, whom he found sitting up in an easy-chair, half-dressed, but so swathed in bandages that he could hardly move.

Dismissing Waif, who was in attendance as usual, he laid a finger on his patient's wrist, and

marked the strong full beat of the pulse in grave approval.

"How much longer are you going to keep me here?" exclaimed John Garnet with some impatience. "I've been telling Waif for the last three days I am as strong as I ever was in my life."

"Get up," replied the Doctor, "and lift that chair from the floor. So. Do you feel as if a dog were licking a raw place in your side?"

"I feel that I ought to be in the saddle," replied the other, "a hundred miles from your close, smoky town. If it wasn't for these cursed bandages I should never know that I had a side at all."

"Off with them, then!" said Katerfelto, suiting the action to the word by unwinding their folds. "See now the fruits of a little knowledge and a little patience. These wounds have healed, as we call it, at the first intention. Do not be so ready with bare steel again; or, if you must needs brawl, keep your sword-arm bent, and your point moving in a narrower circle."

John Garnet's eyes brightened with pleasure, but his face fell a moment afterwards.

"You have restored me to life," said he, "and I cannot even pay you a surgeon's fee. I tell you plainly, I have not ten guineas in the world."

"We are comrades in the same service," answered the Doctor quietly. "There is no question of guineas between you and me. Will you ride a hundred miles on an errand in which we are equally interested, and cry quits?"

"To the end of the world!" answered John Garnet; "only, I have not a horse to my name."

There was a simple earnestness in his tone that sufficiently vouched for his fidelity. Katerfelto, scanning narrowly the resolute countenance and strong active frame, smiled to think that here was a tool shaped expressly for his purpose.

"I might find horseflesh," said he, "if you can find spurs. Will you be ready to mount to-night on my errand, if it should be necessary? My errand," he repeated, in a low, impressive whisper, "and the King's!"

"God bless him!" answered Garnet, while each looked meaningly in the other's face.

"I have those in my interest," continued the charlatan, "ay, at the very council-table, who keep me well informed from hour to hour. You will dine as usual. You will crack a bottle of our best to the King's health. Before sunset I will tell you when to pull on your boots."

While he spoke a knock was heard at the door, and Waif, glancing softly at John Garnet, brought the Patron a letter left by a man who looked like the light-porter of some city warehouse. It contained these lines :—

"The invoices are already forwarded. Prices ruling high; hemp likely to rise. Realise at once, not a moment to be lost."

Twice Katerfelto perused it with an anxious brow, then he turned to John Garnet, and observed carelessly—

"A stroll before dinner will do you no harm.

Come with me to the next street; I want your opinion of a horse I keep there."

So congenial a request met with an eager affirmative. In the flush of returning health, John Garnet longed keenly for the fresh outward air. And to see a horse again, even in another man's stable, was a return to life and all that made life enjoyable once more.

The Doctor wrapped himself, though it was summer, in a long black cloak, and drew a square cap down to his very eyebrows, before he crossed the threshold, precautions which seemed scarcely necessary for purposes of concealment, inasmuch as he led his visitor along two or three unfrequented by-lanes, to an old tumble-down building, that looked more like a dilapidated pigeon-house than the dwelling of so noble an animal as the horse.

"Enter," said he, unlocking the door. "The husk looks of the roughest, but there is a kernel within."

John Garnet was surprised to find the stable roomy, commodious, well ventilated, and amply supplied with all necessaries for the comfort of its inmate. "If the casket is mean," said he, "at least it seems well lined and water-tight. Let us open that shutter, Doctor, for a glimpse at the jewel it contains."

It was a jewel! An exclamation of wonder and admiration escaped the visitor's lips, as daylight, thus admitted, revealed to him the beauty and symmetry of the animal he came to inspect. From boyhood he had spent much of his time in

the saddle, found a store of pleasure and legitimate excitement in the companionship of his horse, and here seemed the very flower and perfection of the whole equine race.

It was not that the sloping shoulders, the deep girth, the flat legs, the round firm feet, the full, well-turned back, and lengthy quarters denoted strength and speed unequalled, but there was also that proportion and harmony of all the parts which Nature is careful to preserve when she means to turn out some masterpiece of her craft. John Garnet said as much ; and Katerfelto, man of science though he was, could not conceal a certain prim satisfaction, which every man alive betrays when congratulated on the superiority of his steed.

"I am a poor judge," observed the charlatan, whom no earthly consideration would have induced to bestride the paragon before them, "but I imagine the creature is as good as it looks."

"That I'll swear he is!" replied John Garnet, fairly putting his arm round the taper muzzle, that nestled kindly to his embrace. "If I had seen nothing but this beautiful little head, with its full bright eyes, and fine transparent ears, I would have backed him against any horse in England for all I am worth in the world. Not much, to be sure," he added with a laugh, "but you should have carried it for me, old man ; and I don't think the additional weight would have caused you to falter at the post."

He patted the hard, smooth neck, and strong, firm crest while he spoke ; and the animal, though

an entire horse, in the full vigour of good food and high condition, responded lovingly and gently to his caress.

"He knows you already," said Katerfelto; "he will know you better before you have done with him. Listen, John Garnet: what would you give me for that grey horse as he stands?"

"Five hundred guineas!" answered John Garnet, laughing, "if I had them. Ten years of my life, as I haven't five hundred pence in the world!"

"He is yours!" replied the other. "You shall ride him out of London to-night."

John Garnet's eyes brightened. "I do not know who and what you are even now," said he, "but you seem the best friend I ever had. Frankly, Doctor, I already owe you more than I can hope to pay. In my opinion, you have bought me, body and bones, at a high price; and I am ready to do your bidding, be it what it will."

"You speak like a man of sense," answered Katerfelto. "Come back to the house. Waif shall find us some dinner, with a bottle of good old Burgundy, and I will give you instructions at once."

They returned, therefore, to Deadman's Alley, threading the by-streets with the same secrecy as before. Katerfelto informed his companion, as they walked, how he became the owner of so matchless an animal—the last possession, it must be admitted, with which John Garnet would have

credited his physician. "I obtained him," said the latter, "even as I obtained Waif, and from the same people. Only, I paid hard gold for the child; whereas they let me have the horse for nothing."

"And yet they may have stolen both," observed his listener.

The other shook his head. "Waif is a gipsy," said he, "pure bred, or I should never have encumbered myself with her. No; they are a strange people. Their honesty is not like our honesty, neither, indeed, is their fraud; but they have their notions of fair dealing too. They brought me the horse to pay a debt of honour."

John Garnet opened his eyes.

"A debt of honour!" repeated the charlatan. "The rogues had robbed me of some valuable jewels while I was sojourning in their tents during the illness of an old reprobate, whom they called their duke, and whom I attended without demanding a fee. Repenting of such ingratitude too late, for the jewels were beyond recovery, they sent me the highest-priced article they could lay hands on, and it proved to be the very horse you are to ride out of London to-night. How they came by him it was useless to inquire; but they assured me—and I have no reason to doubt their word—that the owner would never cause inconvenience by appearing to assert his claim."

"Do you think, then, they *murdered* him?" exclaimed John Garnet in an accent of dismay.

"Very probably!" replied the other. "But I had little curiosity on the subject; it was no affair of mine."

The silence that ensued lasted to the door of the surgery, and, indeed, with small interruption during the progress of dinner. When that meal was taken away, and Waif, with many a backward glance, had departed and shut the door, Katerfelto filled the glasses, smacked his lips over the Burgundy, and thus delivered himself—

"They would hang you, my good sir, if they could catch you; and this I consider a sufficient reason for your leaving London to-night."

John Garnet gasped, and set his wine down untasted. For some time he had entertained uncomfortable misgivings to this effect. It was not reassuring to hear them corroborated by so sagacious a person as his host. "Chance-medley is not a hanging matter," said he in a shaking voice.

"But murder is," answered Katerfelto; "and murder I fear they would bring it in. Why, in the name of all that is hasty, my young friend, did you not take a couple of gentlemen into that dark room, and exchange a pass or two in the presence of witnesses? See how the matter stands as it would be submitted to a jury. An altercation, brooded over for more than an hour; a quarrel, not in hot blood, but on reflection; and the company gone. The lights out; the younger man escapes, and the elder is found stabbed to death on the floor! It looks ugly, you must confess."

"I have thought so more than once," replied John Garnet, much disturbed. "Do you mean they will try me for—for—my life?" He got the question out with difficulty, and swallowing a mouthful of wine fancied it tasted like blood.

"I mean nothing of the kind," said the other. "I mean you never to be placed in such a position. I mean you to be a score of miles away to-night. I mean to rescue your name, to save your life, and to make your fortune."

"How so?" asked John Garnet, taking comfort while he emptied his glass.

For answer, Katerfelto made an almost imperceptible sign with one of his fingers, to which the other responded by a word, whispered so low that its import was to be gathered less by the sound than the movement of his lips.

"I was sure of it!" exclaimed the charlatan. "I could have sworn from the first you were one of *us*. I may speak freely now. John Garnet, I call upon you this day to ride for the King!"

"To the gates of hell!" was the reckless answer. "And as much farther as your good horse will carry me. I am ready to start this minute."

"Softly," said the other. "I neither require so prompt a departure, nor so long a journey. You need not mount for another hour. You need not ride so far as the Land's End. The business I shall entrust you with demands courage, secrecy, and some little ingenuity. I believe you possess all. To win, opens a path to rank, fortune, and the choicest honours royal gratitude can bestow.

To lose, leaves you no worse than you are now, for at least you will have a fair chance of escape.'

"I ask for nothing better," replied the young man. "Only tell me what to do, and how to do it."

Katerfelto pushed the bottle to his guest. "You will need a good horse," said he, "and good pistols. These I can supply. You have a good sword and a good mother-wit of your own. It may be you will want them all to carry out our plans. Success is a peerage at least; failure means high treason. So you know what you undertake."

"I never shrank from a large stake," replied John Garnet excitedly. "Deal out the cards, and leave me to play the hand!"

"This then is the game," continued his host. "Lord Bellinger took coach to-day for his lieutenancy in the West, carrying with him certain warrants from the Secretary of State which must never reach their destination. You understand. His lordship travels with his own horses, and can scarce perform the journey in less than a week. Her ladyship accompanies her husband, and they sleep to-night at Hounslow, fourteen miles from here at the farthest. Such, my young friend, is the alacrity with which his servants obey the commands of King George. Without a boast, I think our side could give them a lesson in promptitude. I myself knew all about those warrants before the ink was dry. I could tell you now every word that passed between Lord Bellinger and the minister, far more accurately

than my lord himself, who, to do him justice, has a retentive memory for trifles, but entertains the profoundest aversion to every kind of business. Briefly, these warrants must be destroyed before the end of the week, and I look to you for a speedy completion of the job."

John Garnet pondered. Pledged as he had been from boyhood to the losing cause, compromised, by the fatal termination of his late brawl, with the laws of his country, and indebted for life, no less than the means of living, to this strange practitioner of many mysterious arts, the thought of shrinking from the task thus thrust upon him never entered his mind; but he could not conceal from himself that the undertaking was one of life and death, to be accepted resolutely indeed, but not without every precaution to ensure success.

"My lord travels in his own coach, you say," he observed thoughtfully. "How many servants does he take, and are they well armed?"

"Three or four at most," replied Katerfelto, "without counting her ladyship's waiting-maid; and one of these rides on ahead to prepare for his reception, stage by stage, during the journey. They carry a blunderbuss and two brace of pistols among them, no more."

"How far will he proceed in a day?" asked the other. "The roads are at their best just now, and the nights at their shortest."

"From twenty to thirty miles," answered Katerfelto. "His lordship travels in a light coach with six good horses. You had better not

overtake him till to-morrow night. But these details I confide to your own wisdom and discernment. In this purse are a hundred guineas. In that cupboard a saddle, bridle, and brace of pistols. Spend the money, founder the horse, use the weapons at your discretion, but the warrants must be in the fire before his lordship crosses the borders of Somerset, and the gentlemen named in them must be warned, at all risks of life and death."

"I understand," said John Garnet, "though I do not yet see how to set about the job."

"It can be done in three ways," observed Katerfelto. "The warrants will be carefully looked after. To put them in your own pocket, you must corrupt the servants, make love to my lady, or rob my lord."

John Garnet considered a moment before he answered. "I think the best plan will be to rob my lord."

CHAPTER VIII

A HEAVY STAKE

THE travellers spent their first night agreeably enough. The weather was fine, the inn at Hounslow roomy and luxurious. My lady seemed pleased with the fresh eggs, the country cream. My lord found amusement in the airs and graces of his hostess, who was more than flattered by the notice of so fine a gentleman. Even the servants were good enough to express approval of the ale, the lodging, and the change. Our whole party started next morning in good-humour, and the very waiting-maid, who had been in tears for the first six miles out of London, protested that under certain conditions the country might be almost tolerable.

My lord's first footman, a stout high-coloured personage in charge of the blunderbuss, was unremitting in his attentions, and Mistress Rachel, as she was called, in the absence of higher game, condescended to receive his homage with the favour five-and-forty shows to five-and-twenty. At a subsequent period indeed she declared "he hadn't the heart of a hen!" but for the present seemed satisfied to accept him as he was.

Such a favourable state of things could not be expected to last four-and-twenty hours. At noon of the second day it began to rain, a trace broke, a horse cast a shoe, the man with the blunderbuss proved useless in a difficulty, Mistress Rachel grew despondent, my lady sulked, my lord swore, the unwieldy vehicle creaked, groaned, swung, and finally stopped in the middle of a hill.

"Let me out!" screamed Lady Bellinger, whose nervous system was of the weakest, and on whose temper fear had an exasperating effect. "I'd rather walk. I *will* get out, I'll go back,—Richard!—Robin! open the door."

"Don't be a fool!" exclaimed my lord, as the carriage got into motion once more. "How can you go back, Ellen? You're forty miles from London if you're a yard."

My lady's head-dress vibrated with anger. "I am a fool indeed," she replied, "or I shouldn't be here! And this is the reward of my devotion as a wife! This is your return for my accompanying you into exile! Lord Bellinger, I *will* speak. Indifference I am accustomed to. Unkindness I have put up with for many a long day, patient and forbearing, while my heart was broke, but I have a spirit" ("You have indeed," muttered his lordship), "though you try your best to crush it, and ill-usage I will submit to no longer."

It is possible her husband might have entered a more energetic protest than the "d—d nonsense" he whispered under his breath, but that his attention was diverted at this juncture to the beauty and action of a horse passing at a gallop,

ridden by a young man whose seat and bearing did justice to the animal he bestrode. When Lord Bellinger, who thrust himself half out of the carriage to follow the pair with his eyes, subsided into his seat, he had forgotten all about their dispute in this new excitement; my lady, however, with her face buried in a handkerchief, continued to sob at intervals till they reached their destination for the night.

This was a comfortable hostelry enough, yet lacking many of the luxuries that rendered the inn at Hounslow so agreeable a resting-place. Mistress Rachel, alighting with a hand on the shoulder of her admirer, expressed alarm lest it might be tenanted by ghosts; whereat the latter's comely cheek turned pale, while he resolved incontinently to fortify his courage with beer. The new arrivals had no reason to complain of their reception. The servants were amply regaled in the kitchen, a good supper was served for my lord and my lady in the parlour. The choicer meal vanished in profound silence, which Lord Bellinger tried more than once to break; but, finding his efforts ineffectual, and knowing by experience the obstinacy of his wife's reserve when she was out of spirits, he gave up the attempt, and applied himself to the Burgundy his host brought in person. He finished the bottle as her ladyship, in dignified silence, retired to bed; and ringing the bell for another, felt creeping over him the accustomed longing for cards, dice, company—some excitement in which to spend the evening.

"Let me out," screamed Lady Bellinger

"Landlord," said he, as that stout and stolid personage entered the room with a cobwebbed bottle and a corkscrew, "can you play picquet?"

The landlord smiled foolishly. He did not know what his lordship was driving at.

"Fetch a pack of cards," continued my lord, "and I will teach you."

The landlord excused himself in considerable alarm. "It was too much honour," he said; "he doubted he was too old to learn. Would his lordship like a toast of bread and an olive with his wine?"

"I had rather deal than drink," answered Lord Bellinger, "though I'm in the humour for both. If there's nobody in the house to play a game at whist or ombre, send round to the stable, and tell the ostler I will try my luck with him at all-fours."

The landlord stared; but a bright thought struck him, and he observed, "There's a gentleman in the Sunflower who arrived this afternoon. He looks like a gentleman who wouldn't object to a game of cards, or anything in that way."

"Bravo, Boniface!" was the answer. "Carry him my respects—Lord Bellinger's respects—with a bottle of your best, and say, if he is at leisure I shall be happy to wait on him at once."

The landlord delivered his message with alacrity, and in less than five minutes John Garnet answered it in person at his lordship's door. He had come to this hostelry for the very purpose of obtaining the introduction he now found so easy; and rather regretted the amount of thought he had wasted after supper in consider-

ing how he should make Lord Bellinger's acquaintance, and gain his confidence sufficiently to betray it. With his best bow and pleasantest smile, "plain John Garnet" stood on the threshold, and assured the other that no consideration would have induced him to permit his lordship to ascend to the Sunflower till he had himself come down to conduct him upstairs, if he would so far honour his humble apartment, where he would at once direct preparations to be made for the reception of his noble visitor.

"Zounds, man!" answered the other, who at this period of the evening was seldom disposed to stand on ceremony, "we want nothing but a bottle of Burgundy and a pack of cards. They are both on that table. Let us sit down at once and make the most of our time."

"Agreed," replied his guest; "and your lordship shall choose the game and the stakes."

"What say you to picquet?" asked the nobleman, opening the Burgundy. "Ten guineas a game. Twenty—fifty if you like?"

John Garnet, reflecting that he knew nothing of his adversary's force, and was himself no great performer, modestly chose the lowest stake, and proceeded to play his hand with as much care as his own preoccupation and the strange position in which he found himself permitted. Picquet is a game requiring, no less than skill and practice, undivided attention. John Garnet could not forbear glancing about the room for some symptoms of the documents he desired to make his own; wondering if they were kept in his

lordship's pockets, in her ladyship's baggage, under charge of the servants. It is not surprising that at the end of the first game he found himself the better by two glasses of moderate Burgundy, and the worse by ten golden pieces stamped with the image of King George. He ventured a second game, and with the same result.

To do Lord Bellinger justice, he was not a rapacious gambler. He loved winning well enough, but would rather lose heavily than not play at all. "I am too strong for you," said he; "I ought to have told you picquet is my especial game."

But when did a loser ever admit the superiority of an adversary's skill?

"Your lordship held good cards," answered John Garnet; "my luck is the likelier to turn. I call for a fresh pack."

So the waiter was summoned, and more cards, with another bottle of wine, were brought in. Lord Bellinger began to feel the old wild impulses rising in his heart; and John Garnet, a desperate man, bound on a desperate errand, had no disinclination to venture Katerfelto's money in an undertaking that compromised his own head.

After two more games Lord Bellinger had won a hundred guineas; and John Garnet was at the end of his resources.

"My lord," said he, "a man does not journey a-horseback with the Bank of England in his pocket. I have lost to your lordship as much as I can afford to pay."

He spoke with some ill-humour, and rose from the table as though to take his leave.

"One more game," pleaded Lord Bellinger, who would have paid his last guinea rather than go to bed before midnight. "Sit down again, my good sir; if we cannot play for money, we can play for money's worth."

John Garnet obeyed, with a forced smile. To be a good loser was considered one of the essentials in the character of a gentleman; and he would have sunk in his own, no less than in his companion's esteem, had he declined the unequal contest for so paltry an excuse as want of means.

"That is a fine horse you rode here," continued his lordship, shuffling the cards. "If you like to put a price on him, I will stake the sum named against the animal."

"Five hundred!" answered John Garnet.

"Agreed," said the other, though the five hundred guineas he had borrowed from Katerfelto constituted all the funds he possessed in the world.

So they played one more game, and again Fortune smiled on Lord Bellinger, who emptied his glass with a smack, having despoiled his adversary of the grey horse and one hundred guineas in gold.

It seemed an unpromising beginning, but John Garnet's courage rose with the exigencies of his position. He pulled a purse from his pocket, and counted down on the table one hundred guineas, piece by piece, with a good-humoured smile.

"No doubt," said he, "your lordship will give me my revenge at some future time. I shall leave the horse in charge of your lordship's servants to-morrow morning. I can pledge you my word he is as good as he looks."

"What do you call him?" asked the other carelessly.

"Katerfelto," answered John Garnet, taken by surprise, and blurting out the word that first occurred to him, because it would have seemed so strange to hesitate at the name of his own horse.

Lord Bellinger started. "Do *you* know Katerfelto?" said he. "I have always believed that man must be the devil in person!"

"I got the horse with that name," answered John Garnet, "and his new owner can alter it at pleasure; but as I must be a-foot, literally a-foot, early to-morrow morning, I will now take my leave, and wish your lordship good-night."

So, with many profound bows, the pair separated, and the loser, to his extreme disgust, heard Lord Bellinger's door carefully locked on the inside.

CHAPTER IX

STRONG AS DEATH

TO have lost a hundred guineas after supper was bad enough, but to yield possession of the best horse he ever owned, and pursue Lord Bellinger into the West on foot, or by the tardy progress of a stage-waggon, was not to be thought of.

He never intended permanently to part with either, or John Garnet would have been more loath to risk his horse and to pay up his gold. The money must be recovered, and Katerfelto, as he now determined to call the animal, must be retained at all hazards. Pondering these matters deeply, the unlucky card-player only waited till the lights were out and the hotel became quiet to put his plans in execution. An hour after midnight he had drawn off his boots, and satisfied himself that his lordship's door was securely fastened. He must find another opportunity of taking by violence that which he now despaired of gaining by artifice; and he stole out to the stable, there to saddle his horse and effect his escape. Though by no means satisfied with his night's work, he did not

consider he had entirely wasted time or money. In the course of conversation, he had made himself acquainted with Lord Bellinger's intended movements, and could prepare for a bold stroke. "If I had been more fortunate with the cards," he thought, "I might have improved my acquaintance sufficiently to join them as a travelling-companion, perhaps accompanying my lord and my lady in their coach. It would have been easier then to effect my purpose, though I do *not* think I could have found it in me to make love to her ladyship any more than to her waiting-maid. But I never held a card! That hundred guineas I paid down on the table I must have back again, as surely as I do not mean to part with my good grey horse. There is only one way. I must seize the warrants, and recover my money with the strong hand. Some unknown highwayman may bear the blame, and if I can get off, I will lose no time in gaining the West Country and warning the honest squires of Devon and Somerset that they are in danger. Nothing venture, nothing have! I'm in it now, over shoes, over boots! Let me think. Highway robbery. It's an ugly word, and a hanging matter, but so is high treason; and if every neck that risks the noose must be stretched, why, as I heard those player fellows sing last winter—

> 'I wonder there ain't better companie
> Under Tyburn tree!'"

Thus meditating, John Garnet, who had made himself acquainted with the geography of the

hotel and its surroundings, proceeded noiselessly to the stable, not without anxious glances towards the east, where that forerunner of morning, the false dawn, was already visible.

A true horseman, he had identified himself so completely with his steed, and busied himself so earnestly about its wants, that Katerfelto neighed with pleasure to acknowledge the friendly presence as he approached its stall thus stealthily and in the dark. While he hurried to the horse's head, that he might silence this untoward greeting, a slim figure rose from below the manger and glided like a phantom to the door. John Garnet was no less prompt than resolute. In an instant he had seized this shadowy intruder by the throat. Outcry and escape were alike impossible; but his hand opened as if it grasped a red-hot iron, when a half-stifled voice, that he remembered only too well, murmured, "Hold! do not hurt me. I am here to serve you. I will follow you to the end of the world."

"Waif!" he exclaimed, in an accent that, smothered as it was, denoted the very extremity of surprise; but even while he spoke the figure slid through the dark stable out into the night.

For a few seconds John Garnet was persuaded that he must be dreaming—the meeting had been so sudden, so unexpected, and so soon over. When he realised the fact, his surprise amounted to dismay. That this impracticable gipsy-girl should have followed him, watched him, and made herself acquainted with his movements,

seemed a fatal climax to the disasters of the night. For one disheartening minute he thought of riding back to London, returning Katerfelto to his former owner, and abandoning the whole project. Then he reflected that under any circumstances he must make his escape before daylight, and so saddled his horse with what alacrity he might. Dawn was breaking as he led the animal out of the courtyard softly and at a walk, though its tramp was smothered in the snores of a stalwart ostler who slept in a loft above for protection of the stables, and a red streak of sunrise bound the eastern horizon, to which he looked back on emerging from a belt of coppice that skirted the highroad a mile from the inn. Bold as he was, Katerfelto shied at an object moving in the brushwood, while a slim boyish figure sprang out, laid its hand on the horse's shoulder, and looked wistfully up in the rider's face.

Waif—for it was none other—attired as a country lad, and only the more beautiful for her disguise, seemed to anticipate no less affectionate a greeting than she was prepared to offer. But already she knew every change of the face she had studied so fatally, and her own fell while she marked the displeasure that settled on the brows and about the lips she loved.

"Speak to me," she murmured, "for pity's sake. I tracked you so patiently, and followed you so far!"

"Waif, why are you here?" he asked, while his heart smote him to think of the distance

travelled by that slender form, those shapely delicate limbs.

"I could not bear you to go away," replied the girl, laying his hand to her heart and pressing her cheek against Katerfelto's warm shoulder. "I could not live without you; and for the matter of that, you could not live without me. If I had let you go by yourself, every mile you rode was a mile towards your grave."

They were pacing on together, Waif walking at his stirrup with a free untiring step, that the good horse must have fairly broken into a trot to leave behind. John Garnet looked at her with an astonishment in which there was no little interest and admiration.

"What mean you?" said he; "and how came the Doctor to let you go?"

"I never asked the Patron's leave," was her answer, "because, if he had forbidden me, I should have lain down to die. No; when you rode out of London, I was scarcely half an hour behind. The Patron must have been very angry when he found me gone. What do I care? I care for nobody but *you*. I knew where to get these clothes well enough. Do you like me in them? I might have had a horse from our people before I had done a day's journey, but I thought I could be nearer you on foot, and I've walked all the way. I'm not tired. I'd walk as far again only to hear your voice."

John Garnet was in utter perplexity. Such a phase in his affairs he had never contemplated, yet there seemed something so ridiculous in his

position, bound on a political adventure thus attended, that he could not forbear a laugh.

"Nonsense, my lass!" said he kindly enough. "You must go back; indeed you must. I won't have you come a step farther. You ought never to have followed me at all."

The tears were in Waif's dark eyes, and she raised them to his face with the pleading, reproachful look of a dog that you chide when he knows he is doing right.

"Not follow you?" she repeated. "How am I not to follow you, when you are going into danger? I can share it even if I cannot keep it off; and you tell me I must go back to London! You cannot mean it. I don't think you quite understand."

"That's the truest word you have said yet," was his answer; "but I do understand that, for your own sake, you ought not to be here now. Still, if you persist in accompanying 'a beggar on horseback,' you ought to have your share of the saddle till we get down."

With these words, he took her by the hand, and braced his foot in the stirrup to afford a purchase for her ascent. In one bound she stood on his instep, light and buoyant as a bird! in another, she was seated before him with her arm round his neck, and her comely, smiling face very near his own. It might have been the exertion, or the novelty of the position, or something he whispered, with his lips close to hers, that turned Waif crimson, and then deadly pale. She seemed more out of breath now, clinging to the rider,

than she had been a while ago walking beside his horse. Katerfelto, in obedience to his master's hand, broke into a canter; before she spoke another word they were nearing a hamlet, of which the smoke was visible above the trees, when she made shift to ask in a trembling voice if she might not be set down and taken up again when they had passed through? For answer, John Garnet laughed, and increasing his pace, dashed along the street at a gallop. When he relapsed once more into a walk, the startled villagers had been left two miles behind.

Waif's nerves were of the firmest, and she had now recovered some of her self possession—no easy matter for a woman who finds herself seated on the same horse with the man she loves. Her heart beat fast indeed, and the colour came and went in her cheek; but she could review the situation calmly, and resolved that now was the time to explain all she had done, all she intended to do, in John Garnet's behalf. Even those women whose station renders them slaves of custom, like other slaves, assume the wildest freedom when they have elected to throw off the yoke; but this gipsy-girl, an unsophisticated child of nature, had no scruples to vanquish, no social laws to break, found nothing to restrain the ardent expression of her feelings save the innate delicacy of a proud and loving heart.

It was not, therefore, without such a blush and downward glance as few men could have withstood, and none, perhaps, less firmly than John Garnet, that she announced her resolution.

"I shall hold by you to the last. I shall never desert you till you have performed your task in safety. It is right you should know it. But—but—I cannot expect to accompany you like this. Only promise that you will not try to leave me behind, and never fear but I can find my way from place to place, and be at hand when I am wanted, without shaming you by my presence. The gipsy-girl is proud to give her life for you, though you may blush to acknowledge one of my people as your friend!"

"Blush!" repeated John Garnet, and perhaps because their faces were so near together the blushing seemed all on the other side. "I would never blush to own a true friend; and Waif, my pretty lass, you have proved yourself more than a friend to-day. You say that I am in danger; I know well enough that I soon shall be; but my head is out of the halter as yet, and I see not how you could help if it were in!"

"Out of the halter!" said Waif. "How little you fear and how little you seem to care! Do you think I was not listening at the door when Abner Gale came to the Patron thirsting for the man's blood who took his brother's life? You know not our people, John Garnet, nor the gifts that nature bestows on us, instead of hearth and home, bed and board, gold and silver, houses and land. Do you believe the gipsy can forget a path once trod, a voice once heard, a face once seen? I was dancing in Taunton Fair when Abner Gale, one of your priests, as you call them, tossed me a bit of silver, with a coarse

laugh and a brutal jest. The gipsy has no feelings to wound, no character to sustain, no honour to defend, but she has the instincts and the memory of a dog for friend or foe! Parson Gale had better have bitten his tongue through and kept his silver in his pocket. I know his home, his habits, his haunts, his vices, as I know my own ten fingers. I listened because I hated *him*. But when I heard more, I listened on, because—because I loved *you*!"

It was wrong, no doubt, scandalous, shocking, if not entirely without excuse; but something in the proximity of those two young faces again made the girl blush deeper than before.

"There are no secrets too close for the Patron," continued Waif, "and, as you have seen, people come from far and near to consult his art. This man's errand was to discover your hiding-place and hunt you down to death. He gave the Patron money—golden guineas—I heard them jingle. He was in earnest—bitter earnest, and so am I!"

"But what said the Patron?" asked her listener. "I thought he was my friend."

"The Patron is every man's friend," answered Waif, "who is willing to do him service, or to pay him gold. He promised to betray you when the moon was full, but that very night he sent you out of London on his own affairs, and I followed close, lest evil should befall, for I knew you were journeying to the West."

Laughing lightly, he asked if that was a dangerous quarter, and whether the Wise Men,

who came there from the East, were ancestors of her own?

But Waif scorned to enter on the subject of genealogy with one who could neither believe nor understand her claims to a descent coeval with the earliest history of man. Her tone was grave and almost stern, while she looked him steadfastly in the face, and proceeded with her warning.

"When a stag goes down to the water, where an enemy waits to take away his life, the voice of a child or the wave of a woman's hand is enough to turn him back into the moor. Abner Gale lives in the very country to which you are bound. I know the man, John Garnet, and I will save you from his vengeance, though I swing for it—there! Now will you let me come with you and help you as best I can?"

John Garnet did not hesitate long. True, he was unable to stifle certain scruples, while he reflected on the dangers into which this wilful girl was running of her own accord, on her loss of character, if indeed she had any character to lose, and the inconvenience he would himself experience in accounting for such a travelling-companion, however well disguised; above all, on the advantage he was taking of a professed devotion that exchanged, as he could not but admit, the pure gold of sincere affection for a baser metal, compounded of gratitude, vanity, and self-indulgence. But men have seldom far to seek for an excuse when they would do that which is pleasant and convenient rather than right; so John Garnet persuaded himself that to

make this beautiful girl an assistant of his schemes, and comrade in his dangers, was an act of self-denial and loyalty vouching for his fealty to the exile whom he called his lawful king.

"Agreed!" said he; "and now, Waif, if you are really to help me, I must tell you my plans."

He never forgot this ride through the summer's afternoon. The yellow light that glimmered in copse and dingle. The glare on the white road they travelled. The distant lake that gleamed like a sheet of silver — the brook at his feet, that brawled and gurgled and broke into bubbles of gold. The bloom of wildflowers, the song of birds, the murmur of the breeze, the lowing of kine, the deep rich meadows, the stretching uplands, and, over all, that sunny haze which veiled without hiding the distance, and added its crowning grace to the beauties of a landscape that became fairer and fairer the farther he journeyed towards the West.

Katerfelto paced proudly on, while John Garnet poured in a willing ear the details of his journey, and the manner in which he proposed to turn the tables on an adversary who had despoiled him of his money, and could lay claim to his horse. It was difficult to make her understand how the stake could have been lost.

"For," said Waif, "the Patron bids the cards come out just as he likes. It seems so easy, if a man has only the use of eyes and hands! This lord must be very clever with his fingers, cleverer even than you!"

"It's not all cleverness," he answered im-

patiently. "There's such a thing as luck, and I never held a card all night."

Waif stared, and made a motion with her slender fingers, the import of which it was impossible to misunderstand.

"But that would have been dishonourable," protested John Garnet.

"Dishonourable!" repeated Waif. "Why? When you sit down, you do not mean to be beat. It is only a trial of skill, like a race or a wrestling-match. Let the best man win. Why is it dishonourable?"

Despairing to explain to this untutored mind the code of fair play as practised amongst so-called men of honour, John Garnet proceeded to discuss the means by which, in a few hours, he hoped to equalise the chances of Fortune and reimburse himself for his previous losses. Of his scheme Waif greatly approved, holding, nevertheless, to her first opinion, that it would have been wiser to win by fraud than to lose by ill-luck, but promising her hearty assistance in all parts of the plan he proposed to carry out.

Thus conversing, they arrived at the outskirts of a country town; and here, before John Garnet could suggest that he should alight and lead the horse on foot, thus to avoid the remarks that might be provoked by its double burden, Waif glided like water from the saddle, slipped through a tangled hedge by the wayside, and disappeared. In vain, standing high in his stirrups, he peeped and peered over the obstacle; in vain he galloped to the gate, and searched and traversed the whole

meadow, calling her loudly by name. The girl had vanished; and riding thoughtfully into the town, her late companion, for the second time since daybreak, wondered whether he was under the spell of some unholy witchcraft, or was really awake and in his right mind.

CHAPTER X

MARLBOROUGH DOWNS

H! them was good times for we! I often wish as we'd Galloping Jack back again."

The speaker, a lame old ostler, clattering about his stableyard in wooden clogs, with a bucket in each hand, addressed himself to an unseen individual at the taproom window, who blew out large clouds of tobacco-smoke in reply.

"He was free, he was!" continued the ostler, —"as free with a guinea as you and me with a shilling. I'll wager a quart as he was a gentleman born, right or wrong. Such gold lace as he wore! and such horses as he rode, to be sure!"

The old man seemed lost in admiration of the memories called up by Galloping Jack.

"What's gone with him?" asked the unseen smoker in the taproom.

"What's gone with 'em all?" said the other angrily. "A nightcap and a nosegay, I doubt,

like the rest. But he loved his profession, did Galloping Jack; an' many's the pleasant ride he took across the Down, and what not, afore he mounted his wooden horse on Tyburn Hill."

"We'll hope it never came to that," replied the other, with something of amusement in his tone.

"Ah! I'm afear'd it's past hoping and praying for too," said the ostler. "But it's a gentleman's trade," he added, reverting to his own professional view of the highwayman's calling; "a gentleman's trade—I've always said so. Look what cattle they can afford to keep!"

"You're a judge of such matters, I suppose," observed the smoker in the taproom.

"Man and boy," answered the other, "I've been about horses nigh fifty year. If I don't know a good nag when I see 'un, master, well, I'd better give out, an' take on with some likelier trade."

"That's the right sort you dressed over a while ago," continued the smoker, leaning out of window, and showing a tall, active frame, surmounted by a swarthy face with the eager expression of a hawk.

The ostler set his bucket down, and winked.

"You're a judge," said he, "you are, and so you ought. There's a many passes through your hands, Master Cooper, but I never see you with such a nag as this here. He's a cut above you, every way—he is."

"That's a good one!" answered the dark man, with a boastful laugh. "Why, Ike, you old fool! I tell you I owned that very horse myself, and I *gave* him—gave him away as a present to a friend of mine."

"But how came Galloping Jack to part with him?" asked the ostler, much interested. "I knowed the horse, bless ye, as well as the horse knowed me, when he came into the yard not two hours back; but he's in the hands of a real gentleman now, and as pretty a rider as ever drew a rein through his fingers. There was something about his seat as put me in mind of Jack, too, and something in the way he carried his hands; but I can't call to mind seeing Jack without a mask on. Speak up, Master Cooper: it couldn't be the man himself, could it now? I never heerd as he'd swung for sure."

"Who knows!" answered the other, with a harsh laugh. "You water your horses, and mind your own business, Ike, and I'll tell the drawer to give you a pot of ale when you come into the house."

Now John Garnet, sitting after dinner at an open window above the stableyard, overheard the foregoing conversation, and resolved straightway to take advantage of his own likeness to the missing hero whose horse he had so strangely appropriated. Katerfelto seemed well known in these parts as the property of Galloping Jack, and, indeed, an animal of such remarkable beauty was sure to be recognised by anyone concerned with horses who had ever seen it before. If the rider's figure, too, resembled the highwayman who had been in the habit of concealing his features in a mask, it was quite possible that he, John Garnet, riding the best horse in England, might, so long as it suited his purpose, be mis-

taken for the enterprising person known on the Great Western Road as Galloping Jack.

At a glance he perceived how such a confusion of characters would facilitate a project he had been maturing all day—a project that, after a few hours' rest and refreshment at the wayside inn, it seemed quite practicable to carry out before nightfall. To rob a coach single-handed, that contained four well-armed men, of whom he had reason to suppose one at least would fight to the death, seemed a bold stroke ; but while he looked to the loading of his pistols, the fitting of his saddle, the feeding and bridling of his horse, and all the details on which his very life depended, he entertained but little fear for the result. His plan, though desperate in its nature, was not without discretion. He had ridden for two days ahead of Lord Bellinger's carriage, and had now turned back on his track. By sunset he calculated that the travellers would arrive at a solitary clump of trees he had marked in the lonely plain on Marlborough Downs. Here he might conceal himself, shoot one of the horses as it passed, and leaping out, stun my lord with the butt-end of his pistol. The servants, he hoped, would be so panic-stricken, that in the confusion he might possess himself of the papers he required, and rely on Katerfelto's speed to make his escape. All this he had confided to Waif, and now Waif was not forthcoming, though she had promised him assistance of some mysterious nature she seemed unwilling to explain. Well, he must do it single-handed, that was all, and let Galloping Jack bear the blame.

The landlord looked after him with approval as he rode out of the innyard an hour before sunset. His wife and her maids lavished admiring glances on the handsome coat and graceful seat of this comely horseman; while old Ike, drawing his hand down Katerfelto's firm smooth quarters, blessed him as he went. Golden opinions had the stranger won from each and all; yet each and all, if examined on oath, would have sworn they believed him to be a man who earned his daily bread by crimes that the law punished with death. Who but a highwayman would order so costly a dinner, such choice wine, and leave both almost untouched? Who but a highwayman would bow to the very kitchen scullion like a courtier while he scattered a handful of silver in her dirty apron, or fling a guinea (his last guinea) at old Ike's head whilst the ostler held the stirrup for him to get on? They looked meaningly in each other's faces as he disappeared, riding steadily towards the endless Down, and old Ike, with the tears standing in his eyes, clattered back to his brooms and stable-pails, muttering, "He always wur free-handed, an' now he's gone his ways again for good, an' I shan't never see him no more!"

John Garnet rode slowly on at a pace that should husband Katerfelto's powers. The sun was already set when he arrived at the clump of trees where he meant to lie in ambush; but he passed it, unwillingly enough, and affected to proceed on his journey; for lonely as seemed the wide expanse of Down, its solitude was broken by

a motionless figure, to all appearance intently on the watch.

His business admitted of no observers. After a moment's hesitation he turned on his track, and rode straight to the figure, as if to ask his way.

In the twilight he made out a tall dark man, who might have been a shepherd but for want of sheep and sheep-dog, and who never moved a limb while he approached.

"My friend," said the horseman, "I have forgotten something at the inn I left an hour ago. If you will take a message back you shall have a crown-piece for your pains."

The other pointed to the London road. "I can earn a crown-piece without walking three miles for it," said he, "and so can you, Master Garnet, if you'll stay where you are."

John Garnet fairly started at the sound of his own name.

"Who the devil are you?" he exclaimed, "and what are you doing here?"

"I am here on *your* business," was the unexpected answer. "You're about a tough job, sir, and you'll do it, never fear, but not single-handed."

"I don't know what you mean," replied the other; adding, after a moment's consideration, "did I not see you this afternoon smoking in the taproom of the inn?"

"Very like," said the man composedly. "I've seen you many more times than ever you've seen me. Why, now, you look quite astonished that a gentleman can be put down by a plain man!

Well, it's no use beating about the bush; I'm here to look after you because Thyra bade me come."

"Thyra!" repeated John Garnet, with an air of sudden enlightenment; "what, Waif do you mean? Why, you must be Fin Cooper?"

"That's my name in your patter," said the gipsy; "now I'll tell you my business. Stay, all that will keep; I hear the roll of wheels. In ten minutes the coach we are both looking for will be plodding up the hill. Go in with a will! Do it your own way; there'll be plenty to help when the time comes. Take what you want, and leave us Romanies the pickings. There's half a score here that go share and share alike."

John Garnet had little time to demand an explanation, or indeed to make up his mind. Already he could distinguish Lord Bellinger's coach labouring slowly up a slight ascent, crowned by the clump of trees before mentioned. He withdrew himself into their shelter, and scanned, as well as the failing light permitted, the strength of the party he had determined to attack. It happened that the servant whose duty it was to ride ahead from stage to stage had fallen to the rear; and this accounted for his missing that forerunner, on whom he had calculated to warn him that his prey was drawing near. This increased the defending force to five; including my lord, a coachman, and two footmen; of whom one carried a blunderbuss, and was impeded moreover by the charge of Mistress Rachel.

Of his own auxiliaries he knew nothing.

Wherever the half-score mentioned by Fin Cooper were concealed, not a man but the tall gipsy had yet shown himself, and he seemed unarmed by so much as a stick. Nevertheless, the coach was close upon them now. Lady Bellinger's peevish tones might already be heard from the inside.

Unseen in the black shadow of the trees, he took a pistol from his holsters—Katerfelto standing like a rock—and sighted the near wheeler. Simultaneously with the report of the weapon and two female shrieks the animal fell dead, shot through the brain, bringing down its coach-fellow across its body, in a confused turmoil of snortings, plungings, and broken harness.

In an instant my lord had whipped out of the carriage, sword in hand, with his coat torn up the back from the vigour with which my lady pulled at it in her fright. Determined, nevertheless, to sell his life dearly, and ready, to do him justice, for a fight at any odds, right or wrong.

The mounted servant, crying "Thieves!" and "Murder!" turned his horse, and rode away at a gallop; while the footman who carried the blunderbuss, shaking himself clear of Mistress Rachel, dropped on his knees, and begged pitifully for life.

His fellow, however, being of a bolder nature, snatched the weapon out of his hand to point it full in John Garnet's face, and pulled the trigger like a hero.

It only flashed in the pan; somebody had been tampering with the firearms at the last stopping-

THE ANIMAL FELL DEAD SHOT THROUGH THE BRAIN.

place. The assailant was in no real danger but from Lord Bellinger's naked steel. That nobleman made at him fiercely enough; and though Katerfelto answered rein and spur, as if well trained in such hand-to-hand conflicts, John Garnet might have been obliged to use fatal means in self-defence, but that half a dozen figures sprang like magic from amongst the trees; a cloak was thrown over my lord's head, while he was dragged to the earth; the servants were securely gagged and bound; my lady and Mistress Rachel compelled with hideous threats to keep silence; and the original aggressor found himself at liberty to rifle the carriage unmolested, and take what he required.

There was no difficulty in finding the warrants. With these and the hundred guineas he had lost safe in his pocket, John Garnet turned Katerfelto's head towards the Down, pausing one moment to thank the gipsies for their timely aid, and impress on them the necessity of mercy towards their captives. In that moment Waif's hand clasped his own, and Waif's voice murmured in his ear—

"My tribe have done you good service; leave the rest to me. I do not say farewell, for it would break my heart to think we should not meet again!"

CHAPTER XI

A PECULIAR PEOPLE

IT is only fair to state that Lord Bellinger writhed and struggled with a vigour not to have been expected from his attenuated frame, much to the delight of his captors, who were inclined to treat him more leniently than if he had submitted, like his footman, without show of resistance. This champion they kicked and belaboured to some purpose, while they pinioned his fellow-servant, from whose readier hands they had wrested the harmless blunderbuss, and threatened him in frightful language if he ventured to stir a finger. To my lady, though insisting that she should retain her seat in the carriage, they behaved with extreme politeness. She was afterwards heard, indeed, to protest that the robber-chief, as she called Fin Cooper, seemed a perfect gentleman; that he had a distinguished air, and for a black man—though, in a general way, she could not abide black men (Lord Bellinger being as black as a crow)—was by no means ill-looking.

Mistress Rachel, too, while frightened and hysterical, as behoved her station, clung persistently to the arm of a stout gipsy, who mounted

guard over her person, entreating him, in piteous terms, to respect her youth, and, above all, to protect her from the insults of his comrades; lavishing on him tender glances, and contrasting his assured demeanour with the cowardice of her late admirer, whose very teeth chattered for dismay. My lord, in the meantime, with a swarthy fellow at each limb, lay helpless on his back, cursing volubly, but losing neither presence of mind nor temper. Indeed, when he had sufficiently relieved his feelings by such ebullitions, and perceived that no violence was offered to Lady Bellinger or her maid, the situation seemed to strike him as ludicrous, and, bursting into a laugh, he called on the gipsies to release him, promising, on his honour, that no further resistance should be offered by himself or his servants to the continuation of their frolic.

Fin Cooper took him at his word. Exchanging a few short sentences with Waif in his own Romany language, unintelligible to the captives, he raised Lord Bellinger to his feet and restored the rapier which had been wrested from that struggling nobleman.

"You are a *Gorgio Raia*," said he, "and I but a *Romany Chal*. Nevertheless, there is honour among thieves, and I'll trust yours if you'll trust mine."

"I cannot speak your language," answered his lordship; "but your manners are those of a perfect gentleman. Pray select from my coach whatever articles you fancy, except her ladyship, my wife, whose health does not permit of her

taking exercise on foot; and I would venture to suggest that, in rifling the sword-case, no violence be used. It contains three bottles of excellent Chambertin, which it would be a pity to break. I can only regret that I am not better prepared to entertain so large a party."

"You're made of the right stuff," answered Fin Cooper; "and another time you'll know that a *Romany Chal* means a gipsy-lad, and a *Gorgio Raia* a nobleman of the Gentiles. We'll drink your health, my lord, never fear, and give yourself and your lady a share, if you'll condescend to wet your lips on the same cup with us. Now, pals," he added, turning to the gang, "take what you want and let us be off. High Toby's a good game for the winner, but it's best to play it out before the moon gets up."

The gipsies then proceeded to appropriate the contents of the coach, exchanging grins and smiles and whispered congratulations in their own language on the value of their prize.

Only Waif stood aloof, gazing into the darkness, where the grey horse and his rider had long ago disappeared.

Presently a scream from my lady announced that some tawny hand was laid on her jewel-case. "My diamonds!" she exclaimed; and tears of real distress rose in her eyes, as she raised them to Fin Cooper's face. "Oh, sir, I beseech you, let me keep my diamonds! For pity's sake do not send me back into the great world naked and ashamed, without so much as a clasp of brilliants to fasten round my neck."

"I do believe as her ladyship would rather lose her maid than her jewels," whispered Rachel, with a glance at her swarthy guardian that intimated no great disinclination to be retained as a pledge instead.

My lord laughed. "I would play you for the set, and welcome," said he. "But though you will find a pack of cards in every pocket of the coach, the devil a guinea have I left to stake. It's a pity," he added, "for just now I'm in a vein of luck. Only last night I won five games running off our friend on the grey horse, though it seems to be his turn now!"

"Galloping Jack is hard to beat at any game he chooses to play," answered the gipsy, in whose ear Waif had whispered a few hurried words. "Nevertheless, win or lose, he's far enough by this time. It takes a bird of the air to catch Jack when he gets his spurs into the grey."

"Confound him!" said his lordship heartily, reflecting that, by all the rules of fair play, this enterprising highwayman was now riding into safety with *his* money on *his* horse. "Drink up your liquor, my good friends, and let us make some arrangements for the future. I presume you do not wish us to remain unsheltered on the Downs all night?"

"Not an inch will I stir without my diamonds!" exclaimed his wife. "Mind that, my lord. If they go into captivity, I go too!"

"And I humbly hope, as is my bounden duty, to attend your ladyship," added Mistress Rachel,

trying hard to blush, while she stole another look in her guardian's gipsy face.

Fin Cooper scratched his handsome black head in some perplexity. Of all incumbrances, the last he would have chosen was a lady of quality, with her waiting gentlewoman. How was he to get them to the tents? What was he to do with them when there? If retained as hostages they would give more trouble than they were worth; and such a speculation promised no great profit, for Lord Bellinger's easy indifference seemed to infer neither high ransom nor prompt payment. Fin would rather have foregone jewels, lady, and lady's-maid, than be hampered with all three.

Again he consulted Waif, and, after the interchange of a few brief sentences in their own language, of which my lord, listening intently for all his assumed carelessness, could only catch the words "fakement" (a piece of work), "fashono" (fictitious), and "balanser" (a pound sterling), cleared his brows, and made a profound bow to her ladyship, with all the politeness of a dancing-master.

"The Romany in his tent," said he, "can be courteous as the Gorgio in his castle. If the Rawnie [lady] sets such store by her gewgaws, let her keep them and welcome! When she walks in her jewels among the great ones of the earth, she will think not unkindly of the Romany raklo [the gipsy-lad] who wished her good-luck and good-speed on Marlborough Downs."

He had learned from Waif, whose experience

while in the Patron's service taught her many a strange secret, that the diamonds were but paste, and, with characteristic promptitude, seized the opportunity of affecting a princely magnificence at trifling cost.

Her ladyship, who must have known, while she obstinately ignored, the truth, was disappointed beyond measure. In her own circle many romantic stories were told of the courtesy shown by highwaymen to ladies of gentle birth. She expected no less than to redeem her jewels by some such harmless gallantries as those practised in a game of forfeits, and would have felt little disinclination to dance a rigadoon by moonlight on the level turf with this well-made gipsy for a partner. It seemed a bad compliment that he should give her up the best share of his booty, and never so much as ask to kiss her hand in return.

My lord burst out laughing, and offered his snuff-box. "By St. George," said he, "you must be the king of the gipsies himself. A man who presents a lady with a set of diamonds, and makes no more to do than I would about a bunch of flowers, ought to sit on a throne; and, excuse my freedom, in an unpatched pair of breeches. May I ask the gentleman's name to whom her ladyship is so deeply indebted, and whose generosity is only equalled by the simplicity of his dress?"

The gipsy's black eyes shot a cunning glance in his lordship's face. Its expression was so good-humoured and mirthful, that it was obvious

no insult could be intended; and the slender hand that had stolen like lightning to a knife in his girdle was as quickly withdrawn.

"They call me Fin Cooper," said he frankly, "in the patter of the Gorgios; but if your lordship ever condescends to visit our camping-ground, ask for Kaulo Vardo-mescro [Black Cooper], and you shall receive a brother's welcome in the tents. Prala [brother], there is my hand upon it!"

With a gravity that was in itself ridiculous, the pair shook hands; while my lady, in tones of extreme impatience, demanded "how much longer they were to remain on the open Down, and what was to be done next?"

Again there was a whispered consultation among the gipsies, and again Waif was called into council. Fin Cooper then addressed his prisoners with a calm dignity, such as Lord Bellinger had many times seen attempted unsuccessfully in the legislative chamber to which he belonged.

"My lord," said he, "and especially my lady, it gives me great uneasiness that I should be obliged to cause you inconvenience. My brothers, however, will not hear of your being released till they have gained two hours' start. By that time," he added, looking up at the stars, "it will be nearly eleven o'clock. You will find a good inn, not three miles from this spot, where I will take care that beds and supper are prepared. You will, I hope, be comfortably lodged before midnight. In the meantime, it will be necessary to secure your acquiescence by binding you hand

and foot. Excuse the liberty, my lord and my lady; it is but for a couple of hours."

"And who is to unbind us when eleven o'clock strikes?" asked her ladyship in tones of exceeding disquiet.

"Unless you leave somebody on purpose!" added Mistress Rachel, with a titter.

"I don't see the necessity," observed my lord, tapping his snuff-box; "you have trusted my honour once to-night, why not put me on my *parole* again?"

Fin Cooper pondered. It seemed a good jest enough to leave the party he had captured huddled together on the open Down, tied hand and foot, as it were, in imaginary fetters by Lord Bellinger's word of honour alone; but how if his lordship, treating the whole affair also as a jest, should turn the tables, and proceed to raise the country in pursuit directly his captors had withdrawn? On whose side would the laugh be then?

It speaks well, both for gipsy and nobleman, that Fin's hesitation was of no long continuance.

"I think the Gorgio means fair," he whispered to Waif, "for all he wears a clean shirt on his back. Am I a fool to trust him, my sister, or is he fool enough to respect my trust? We could hardly, without hurting them, tie them up so tight but that they might release one another in the space of two hours; and this job will look quite black enough as it stands, without cruelty. It's highway robbery, Thyra, and, I fear, some-

thing like what the Gorgios call high treason to boot! You are wise, my sister, and know these Gentiles well; counsel me what to do."

Waif reflected for a moment ere she answered, gipsy-like, by a parable.

"Do you remember, brother," said she, "how one night in the apple-water country, on the banks of the Wye, we took a rooster off his perch, and brought the poor dazed chiriclo [bird] into our empty barn by the light of a single lanthorn? How Mother Stanley bade us lay the fowl's bill against the bare boards, and draw from it a line of white chalk to the far edge of the threshing-floor? and how the helpless creature never so much as lifted its beak from the spot to which it believed itself tied? Brother, you speak the truth when you say I know the Gorgios. They are like that foolish barn-door fowl. This Raia here is a game-cock of their choicest breed. At his own time, in his own way, he will strut, and fight, and crow as lustily as the best chanticleer of them all; but tie him up in his word of honour, and he will no more stir an inch out of that imaginary circle than Aunt Stanley's fowl moved from the line of chalk on our barn floor. I have spoken, brother; let us go hence."

The gipsy turned to his prisoner. "My lord," said he, "I will trust your lordship's words. You shall promise, as a gentleman, not to stir in your own person, nor to permit one of your people to leave this spot, till two hours of the night are fairly past. On this understanding your whole party shall at once be set free, and the Romanies

will take their leave, humbly wishing your lordship good-night."

"You'll give me back my watch," said Lord Bellinger, feeling in his empty fob, with a shrug of his shoulders, "or how shall I know when the time is expired, and we may put the horses to?"

Fin Cooper laughed. He liked a man who never threw a chance away, while at the same time he knew the value of a heavy gold watch set in diamonds.

"Look well at that fir-tree, my lord," said he, pointing upwards; "when the moon, now rising, has cleared the second branch from the top two hours will have elapsed, and you can depart."

"If you know the time so exactly without a watch," replied his lordship, "you can have no use for mine. However, it's a pretty keepsake enough, and you're welcome to it. But harkye, my friend, one word before you go. Is there no chance of our being beset by other gentlemen of your profession? You've left nothing for them to take, 'tis true, except the clothes on our backs; but the disappointment might make them harder to deal with than you have been yourselves. You couldn't afford us a guard, could you? That pretty boy, for instance," glancing at Waif, who shrank hastily behind the others, "and a couple of stout fellows, in case there should be a fight."

Nobody but Mistress Rachel seemed disappointed at the gipsy's answer.

"It is needless," he said; "our patrin will hold

you unharmed, as if your coach was surrounded by an escort of Light Horse."

"Your patrin? What is that?" asked my lord.

"The sign that none of our people will pass unnoticed," said the gipsy; "that not one of the profession dare disregard, from the best galloping gentleman on the road to the poor cly-faker who pulls an old woman's petticoat off a hedge. I will set it for you at once."

Thus speaking, he drew his knife from the sheath, and cut three crosses, side by side, in the turf, north, south, east, and west of the party. This done, the word was given to march; and in less than a minute these strange assailants, who seemed to have the facility of deer and other wild animals in availing themselves of any irregularity in the ground, had disappeared from the surface of the Downs, though a moon already nearly full was shining brightly above the horizon.

My lord looked after them in silence as they vanished. Then, turning to his wife, observed, with a meaning smile, "They have left you your diamonds, my dear. I wonder where they learned to know brilliants from paste?"

Her ladyship, an image of outraged dignity, was sitting bolt upright in the back of the coach.

"Their leader is a perfect gentleman," she replied, "and would no more rob a lady of her trinkets than he would allude to her misfortunes. There are noblemen of position who might take

example by the gracious manners and high bearing of this mysterious gipsy."

The taunt, if meant for such, was lost on her husband. · "Two hours," he yawned; "two hours all but five minutes at the best. How shall we get through two mortal hours? There is moonlight—that's a comfort; and our friends have left us the cards. I will sit in the coach and play your ladyship a game at picquet."

"What shall we play for?" said my lady.

"For love!" said my lord, and began to deal.

CHAPTER XII

MARY LEE

THREADING like a herd of red deer the slight undulations of the Down, it took the gipsies but a few minutes to withdraw from the scene of their late outrage. In less than an hour they had approached their own camping-ground, where the tents were already pitched by wives and comrades, the kettles already singing over the twinkling fires of their bivouac. They travelled fast, at a long swinging trot, shifting their bundles from one to another as they went. Fin Cooper and Waif remained in rear of the party, the former arguing that it was the post of danger, and, on this consideration, though she seemed unwilling to lag behind the others, insisting that the girl should bear him company.

Waif was anxious and preoccupied, strangely unlike herself. The black Vardo-mescro had not failed to notice the change, nor was it in his nature to keep silence when aroused. Looking suspiciously in his companion's face, he sang a

scrap of an old Romany ditty, that may be thus rendered :—

"In the month of flowers, between the showers, the cuckoo sings all day ;
But the maiden weeps, while the Romany sleeps, and the Gorgio gallops away.
Too soon, too soon, they are fading in June, and the cuckoo has changed his say ;
And the maiden is dead, and the spring-time fled, when the Gorgio galloped away."

His voice was rich and mellow, yet something of harshness in its tones betrayed the discord within.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Waif, her black eyebrows coming down in an angry scowl over her black eyes.

"You can interpret it for yourself," was his answer. "Thyra, do you remember the red Quantock Hills, and the deep leafy coombs in the broom-pickers' country long ago?"

He spoke in Romany, and she replied in the same language. It stung him to observe that she could not express herself so readily in their own gipsy tongue as in that of the Gentiles, with whom she had passed so many years.

"I remember," said Waif carelessly. "What of that?"

He looked hurt, and a fierce gleam shot from his dark eyes.

"There was a little gipsy-girl on those red hills," he answered, "who came to her gipsy-boy for every earthly thing she wanted, from a bunch of violets in the ditch to a bit of mistletoe on the

topmost branch of the old oak-tree,[1] who stretched her little arms for him to carry her on the tramp when she was tired, who stroked his face every morning at sunrise, and kissed him every night when he lay down to sleep.

"For that little lass the gipsy-boy would have shed all the blood in his young body, and he was but ten years old and five—not yet a man, nor grown to man's stature, but a man in heart, and a giant in his love for the comely, delicate gipsy-girl. So he begged hard of father and mother, uncles and aunts, and he went into her tent with a gift, and prayed of her people that they would give him Thyra to be his wife. They promised, Thyra, do you remember? They promised. They were of the old black race, and the promise of a Lovel is like the oath of a Stanley or a Lee."

"It was so long ago!" pleaded Waif, in rather a trembling voice. "You were always very good to me, Fin. I won't deny it; but it was so long ago!"

His face softened; his voice was very sad and tender while he repeated her words.

"So long ago! and yet I see it as clear as if it had been but yesterday—the fire smouldering at the tent door—the moonshine, silver-white on the Severn Sea — the old grandfather sitting within, shaping a wooden peg with his knife—and my little wife crouching in the corner with her black eyes wide open, like the red hind's calf

[1] This is nearly a solitary instance of the author being at fault in country lore. There is no example on authentic record of the mistletoe growing on the oak.—ED.

I had noosed a week before in Cloutsham Ball. Long ago! Yes, Thyra, it *is* long ago; and every day that has gone by, every night that I have seen it all again in my dreams, scores and brands it deeper and deeper in my true gipsy heart. There is no 'long ago' for you and me, Thyra. We have been one ever since that night when you were promised me by the comely Lovels over the camp-fire. Nothing but death can part us now. My sweet lass, I will be kind and true, for mine you surely are, and always will be."

To a woman whose heart was still in her own keeping, there would have been something inexpressibly touching in the tender glance of those eyes, naturally so fierce and keen; in the gentle tones of that voice, usually so hard, imperious, and clear. She could not but contrast the gipsy's absorbing devotion with John Garnet's joyous, good-humoured carelessness, and shuddered to think how she loved the first and how she was beloved by the second! She temporised—she prevaricated — she said one thing and meant another. Was she not a woman, though a gipsy?

"There would be time enough," she protested, "to consider all these matters when the tribe moved farther West to take up their winter quarters in the wrestlers' country, amongst the Cornish tors and valleys. There was much to be done first; tents to strike, a long journey to be made, to-night's job to be effaced by a speedy change of quarters; and you know as well as I do, Fin," she added, smiling sweetly in his face,

"that a storm is brewing down in the West where we are bound, and the same wind that brings the Kaulo-chiriclo—the Blackbird, as the Gorgios call him—back to his own nest, will blow many a 'balanser' of good red gold into the pockets of the Romany lad who runs his errands. For my part, I hope with all my heart he'll win!"

"What matters it to us?" he replied. "Let the Gorgios fight it out among themselves, and cut each other's throats for a name, like fools as they are! King George, or King Charles, or King James, none of them will put a fowl in the Romany's kettle, nor a broad piece in his palm, but for service rendered and risk run. We must help ourselves, Thyra, take what we want, and keep all we can. Our hand may well be against every man, for is not every man's hand against us? For ages we have been a race apart, and we must continue so for ever. No Romany lad may wed with the noblest lady of the Gorgios; and for the Romany lass who listens to love in another tongue, we do not shame her before our people, but we conceal her, Thyra; we hide her away, where neither father nor mother, uncle nor aunt, Romany nor Gorgio, shall ever find her again!"

His voice had grown thick and hoarse, while drops of sweat stood on the tawny face, now turned to ashen grey. Waif trembled like a leaf.

"I know it," she said; "our people never forgive, Fin, and they never forget."

There was a ring of pride in the last sentence

—tribute to the absent lover, whom even now she could not bring herself to wish she might put out of her mind.

They walked on in silence. She had taken his bundle, and thus laden carried it with a step as free and untiring as his own. They were half a mile behind the other gipsies, pacing side by side in the moonshine over the lonely Down. A light twinkled from a solitary farm many a mile away, and once only was the stillness broken by the honest bark of a sheep-dog. The calm pure air, the sweet summer night, the quiet, the expanse, were all suggestive of those dreams which have so large a portion in life's reality. Her thoughts were far away beyond that western horizon, with the grey horse and its rider. She absolutely started when her companion's voice roused her from the abstraction in which she was plunged.

He had been watching her narrowly. Fin Cooper was as dexterous a gipsy as ever stalked a red deer, noosed a hare, or swung a kettle. Versed in the lore, as in the malpractices of his people, he knew how to tell fortunes by cards or palmistry ; to interpret the patrin of his comrades, the signs of the zodiac, even the stars of heaven ; but he could not read a woman's heart. This was the last moment he should have chosen to inculcate a lesson of fidelity and obedience on his promised wife.

"Thyra," said he, while she turned on him a pale and dreamy face, "did your people never tell you the story of Mary Lee?"

"I have heard something about her," she

stammered, with a frightened look. "She died, didn't she? or was lost? I—I forget the rights of it."

"I will tell it you now," said he. "Take every word to heart, Thyra, and forget rather the mother that bore you than Mary Lee's fault and its punishment.

"She was a beautiful gipsy-girl, sister, such another as yourself, with eyes like stars, and a voice to coax the bird off a tree. She lived with her grandam, old Mother Lee, and her uncle, a stern, thick-set Romany, who seldom spoke, and never smiled. They said he killed a squire's keeper before their tribe came south out of the potato-country, and knew Norwich Gaol, inside and out, as well as I know the knife in my belt. Many a time, when I was a little lad, I've seen Mary lifting the kettle off its hook before their tent; and if it hadn't been for you, Thyra, and the word of the Lovels, I should have thought her the likeliest lass that ever put a bodkin in a knot of black hair; so did a good many more—Stanleys, Hearnes, Coopers; she might have had the pick of them, besides the best of her own tribe, and the comeliest of the comely Lovels to boot. I've seen many a good round fought, ay, and knives drawn, too, for a chance word from Mary Lee.

"And she wouldn't so much as throw away a look on the best of us! When Jack Marshall beat the Gorgio light-weight in fifty minutes, and brought her the battle-money before he had scarce washed his face or pulled his shirt on, she called

him a fighting blackguard for his pains. We said in the tents that, gipsy or Gentile, the man wasn't born yet who could put the charm on Mary Lee.

"She did little work at home; and, except for lifting a kettle, or setting a tent-peg, kept her hands as clean as a lady's; but she went out by herself to fairs and races, *dukkering* for the Gorgios and those who tell fortunes to the gentlefolks, and came back with gold in both hands. The old grandmother's kettle was never empty, and they gave her plenty of liberty to do what she liked. Sometimes she would stay away a month at a time.

"One summer afternoon a little boy, who had been stealing nuts in a wood a mile or two from the camp, came back with a gentleman's riding-glove that he had picked up among the hazels. Mary laughed when she saw it, and bought it of the child for a crooked sixpence and a whistle. A week after, when they asked her what she had done with the glove, she said it was lost. That set some of our people thinking.

"Then she went off again about harvest; and after she'd been gone a week, Barney Smith came into the camp with a strange story that he had seen a Gorgio lady, the living image of Mary Lee, sitting at an open window in the bookfellows' town at the time of Oxford Races. Barney was doing a little business there with a pedlar's box on his own account. Though it was a hundred miles off, he came back directly; but when he talked of the pearls and satins she wore,

and the black spots on her face, with powder in her hair, we all said Barney must have been drunk or dreaming. That night her uncle sat up to put new soles on his shoes, and the next morning he left the camp at daybreak.

"I was but a lad, Thyra, and as busy as a squirrel. When a week passed, then a month, and still no tidings came of Mary Lee, I went across the Viney Ridge to the tents of her people and watched. We were lingering in the swineherds' country, among the deer in the New Forest, and good times we had, I can tell you, with fat venison in the kettles and firewood for the cutting. I harboured a buck in Bolderwood once, and watched him for seven hours on a stretch. I've watched longer than that for you, Thyra. I've watched nearly as long on behalf of Mary Lee.

"The moon had gone down, and the false dawn was peeping between the stems of the old oaks, when I caught sight of a square, thick figure threading the track among the trees that led to the Lees' camp. I leaped up, and took him by the hand. He was trembling all over. 'You are welcome back, Uncle Ryley,' says I. 'You've made a long journey, uncle; have you returned empty-handed, or did you find what you went to seek?'

"'The shoes are worn from my feet, brother,' was his answer. 'For three days and three nights I have gone without food or rest; but I took what I wanted, Fin, and I can hold up my head once more among my people.'

"'Did you hear any news of Mary?' was my next question, and my heart rose to my mouth while I asked it, for he was a strong, fierce man, who would strike with fist or steel if he was angered, and never give you a chance. I could scarcely believe it was Ryley Lee who answered in that weak, low voice, with a cheek that had turned grey, like the ashes of a wood-fire in the dim morning light.

"'It is well with her,' was all he said, 'but you will see Mary in our tents no more.'

"'She is dead!' burst from my lips, for there seemed a smell of blood in my nostrils, and the pale streaks of dawn grew crimson between the trees.

"'It is well with her,' he repeated, turning from me into his tent. 'Mary Lee has left her people—dead or alive we shall see her no more.'

"Then I knew she had paid the price it costs the Romany maiden who loves a Gorgio too well!"

Waif had changed colour more than once during the above recital; but though she looked very pale now, there was a firm, hard expression in her face that denoted some fixed purpose no consideration should set aside.

"The hawk does not mate with the barn-door fowl," said she, "and the Romany chal marries with the Romany chi, for surely we are one people; but this affects neither you nor me, Fin. If gipsies cannot trust each other, how shall we hold our own against the Gentiles? Mary Lee

was a good-for-nothing hussy; Uncle Ryley a cruel, bloodthirsty monster; and here we are at the camp. Take your bundle, Fin; I've carried it till I'm tired. Yes; I'll shake hands with you. Good-night."

Extricating herself impatiently from the embrace of her affianced husband, who succeeded, however, in pressing his lips against her brow, she disappeared within one of the tents, leaving Fin Cooper outside, a prey to contending feelings, among which jealousy and suspicion were in the ascendant. He loved the girl, of that he felt quite sure; and in such a character, love is a fearful motive-power for good or evil. It possesses also a keen instinct of reciprocity, not to be deceived, and few conditions are more pitiable than that of a strong wilful temperament persuading itself, against its own convictions, that it is not exchanging gold for silver, that the ship which carries its whole freight is not sinking hourly beneath its feet.

The gipsy would have been angered, even to baring of steel, by any comrade who had warned him of that which his heart began to tell him too plainly, though he dared not admit it to himself, who had hinted that Thyra loved another, and that other one of the forbidden race — which, for all his Romany pride and Romany prejudices, he could not but acknowledge superior in every respect to his own. But he knew it, nevertheless, and only waited an opportunity to avenge himself on the rival,

whom he had identified, almost to certainty, with John Garnet, *alias* Galloping Jack, the highwayman. Even now, he thought it might not be too late to detach Waif from her unworthy and impossible attachment. Far into the night Fin Cooper tossed and turned from side to side, restless and sleepless, because of his wrongs, his memories, and his feverish longing to have his hand on John Garnet's throat.

Waif, too, was uneasy and wakeful. She had not listened to the tale of Mary Lee without accepting its moral for a warning to herself. Well she knew that in the bloody code of her people, to love a Gorgio was an offence punished by death. And she loved a Gorgio! Ay, loved him, as she thought with a thrill of pride, essentially womanly in the exquisite pleasure it evoked, the more deeply and dearly for the penalty. No pale-faced girl could care for him like that! When the time came, she would give him her life, as she had given him her love, without a murmur or a reproach.

Perhaps at that moment he was looking at the very star on which her eyes were fixed, as it twinkled through the gaps in her brown weather-worn tent. Perhaps, who knows, in another life, to be spent up there amongst those stars, they might find themselves together? And so Waif's dark eyes closed in that other life, on which we enter every night, and the girl sank into a peaceful sleep, dreaming calmly of her love.

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE SCENT

WITTINGLY or unwittingly, nobody ever offended Katerfelto without regretting it. To do him justice, the charlatan had every intention of screening John Garnet from the avenger of blood when he started his patient on the Western Road in pursuit of Lord Bellinger's ponderous coach-and-six. The young man, he thought, would prove a useful tool enough, and he had no objection to do him a kindness into the bargain, provided it cost nothing and would turn to his own advantage; but when he discovered Waif was missing too, before the good grey horse and its rider had been six hours out of London, he at once connected the girl's flight with *his* absence whom she had nursed so tenderly, and in a quiet, remorseless way vowed vengeance upon both.

John Garnet's mission, if fulfilled at all, must be carried out within three days at farthest. When accomplished, it mattered little what became of the messenger. Perhaps the sooner he was set aside the better. What was the

cost of a man and horse, valuable as might be the latter, compared with the interest at stake, with the gains and losses of the great game in which every player waged life and fortune on the result?

Parson Gale, wearying sadly of London, and longing for his moorland hills, found himself no longer put off with mysterious hints and unintelligible jargon; but, to use his own metaphor, was laid on the line, like a bloodhound, resolving to track it, inch for inch, till he pinned his quarry by the throat.

Many misgivings had the Parson during this, perhaps the most unpleasant, week he ever spent in his life. Orthodox in his opinions, however lax in his practice, it went cruelly against the grain to believe that in seeking Katerfelto's assistance he was tampering with the powers of darkness. Many a time, after his coarse pot-house supper, was his sleep haunted by grotesque visions of the Evil One, carrying to eternal torment a figure in boots, bands, and cassock, that he recognised for his own. His knees used to shake, and his short grizzled hair to stand on end, when the charlatan, leading him into a dark room, bade him wait patiently, while inquiries were made of certain intelligencies that ought to have done with things of earth, yet betrayed a marvellous interest in earthly trifles, earthly follies, and earthly cares. The minutes seemed lengthened into hours while he sat motionless, expecting every moment to behold the pale violet gleam of a corpse-light, to feel the faint flutter of spirit-fingers, catch the

faint breath of spirit-whispers—worst of all, to be threatened with the personal manifestation of some obtrusive spirit itself.

Katerfelto, who possessed a strong sense of humour, and enjoyed a joke for its own sake, even though he had none with whom to share it, used to describe at length the discipline, the gradations, the daily life, scenery, and vegetable productions of the spirit-world; counting its spheres, explaining its mysteries, and insisting strongly on the somewhat thick-witted good-nature of its inhabitants.

The Parson's nerves were of no sensitive fibre. He possessed his share of English bull-dog courage. Give him a beefsteak, a tankard of ale, and

> "Had a Paynim host before him stood,
> He had charged them through and through";

but he was not proof against dangers of which he had no experience, and could form no conception. The crowning dread of his life at this period was the apparition of some luminous figure, clad in misty robes of white, prepared to answer his questions evasively in a hollow whisper, lift him bodily into space for pure fun, and lay in his hand a flower of no terrestrial growth, fresh and fragrant, but wet with the dews of another world. It never did appear to him, and very thankful he felt that it did not!

It was therefore with no slight feelings of relief that, on his last visit to Deadman's Alley, he found the charlatan dressed to go abroad, and was invited by that unaccountable person to

partake of a bottle by daylight, rather than await a manifestation, fasting, in the dark.

"Your servant, sir," said the Parson, flinging his shovel-hat in the corner, while he filled his glass without a second bidding. "This looks like business, Doctor, at last. Indeed, I am sick to death of the town life and the town ways. But for your message, I should have been on the good bay nag-horse, half a day's journey towards Exeter by this time."

"Do they use you so badly, then?" asked Katerfelto with a smile, while he scanned him keenly from under his bushy eyebrows. "Do they not treat Abner Gale with proper respect as a West-country gentleman, a noted sportsman, and a pillar of the Church? In sad truth it is a perverse and ignorant generation."

"Now you're bamming me, Doctor," replied the other good-humouredly. "But a man is entitled to his jest who gives such wine as this. My service to you. Yes, I'll take a second glass, the more willingly as I shall not have another chance. I leave London to-morrow at sunrise, weather permitting, and before high noon, as we say in the West, whether or no!"

"Is it purse or patience that you have worn out?" asked Katerfelto; "there are means of replenishing the one and repairing the other."

"Both!" answered the Parson. "A man had as well be in the Fleet Prison as the coffee-room of a Covent Garden hotel! I seem to pay hard money for every breath I draw, and not to breathe freely after all! I'm an early stirrer, Doctor!

Man and boy, winter and summer, I've been used to see the sun rise. Ah! you can breathe in my country like a grampus if you choose. Well, I come down to break my fast at a reasonable hour, and not a creature is afoot in the whole house but the cat and me. Presently steals in a slip-shod drawer, unbraced, uncombed, unwashed, and scarce half-awake. The varlet fetches a toast and tankard, may be, with a knotch from the musty end of a chine that the rats have gnawed in the night. I fling it at his head; I cuff him soundly; I kick him round the room in my stocking-feet, for the other knave will not have cleaned my boots till noon. Presently I drink my beer, and forgive him; but to make peace with the rogue costs me a crown. At last I get my coat and hat brushed, band fitted, boots blacked, and sally forth into the streets. They're full, Doctor,—a man can scarce turn himself round; yet do I feel so lonely, that if I was a woman or a child I should sit down and cry.

"I might ride through Exmoor half a summer's day and never set eyes on a human face, but the curlew seems to know me as he flits by, with a quiet call of greeting and a wave of his wide brown wing—the red hinds, leading their calves along the ridges, look kindly over their shoulders, and turn their handsome heads to gaze after me, till they disappear. Why, the very breeze, whispering among the rushes, has been pilfering in my own garden, not so many miles away. You know no more than a blind man what morning means till you've seen the sun rise in

North Devon! I wish I was back there now. I *will* be back there next week if I'm alive!"

"But surely, Doctor," observed Katerfelto, with a covert smile, "a man of your presence finds no difficulty in making acquaintances and even friends. The Londoners are not an inhospitable people, and are said to be exceedingly kind to a stranger if he has but money in his pockets."

"Kind enough!" answered the other, "so long as it costs nothing. They'll find fair words, I grant, and plenty of them, at the rate of a guinea apiece. It was but yesterday two ladies gave me good-morrow from their coach so heartily I made sure I must have met them on Taunton racecourse, or may be in the Cathedral close at Exeter. 'Welcome to London, Doctor,' says one; 'how did you leave your friends in the West?' 'You don't remember me, Doctor,' laughs the other, as comely a wench as you'll see this side of Devizes, 'but I haven't forgotten you, and I wish I could.' So I off with my hat, and up into the coach without another word, thinking for sure I had fallen among friends at last; and, would you believe it? the first was an old harridan that might have been my mother, and the second hussy had scarce a tooth in her head, besides being raddled with red paint, and smelling of brandy fit to knock you down! Nay, I have done with your London once for all. If I make good speed I'll be home in time for Dulverton Feast. I'll have no need to look about for friends there; and I can tell you, Doctor, I've been parched with strong ale and heady port, till I long for a gallon of cider, if it

cost me five shillings a quart. Now we'll go to business, by your leave. If you've any more to say in my matters, out with it! Anyway, bad or good, let us settle up and part friends!"

"I have constrained those to do my bidding who can furnish the intelligence you require," answered Katerfelto solemnly. "To-night, if you have the courage."

"Nay, nay!" interrupted the Parson, his jolly face blanching at the suggestion, "your word is quite enough, Doctor. I neither doubt you nor them. Name your price, and let us have done with it!"

"Go home, then," continued the charlatan, "with what speed you can make. Amongst your own West-country hills you will find your enemy and the slayer of your kinsman, John Garnet by name; a proper youth, able-bodied, and an expert swordsman. If I bade you spare him, would you listen one moment to my plea?"

He was not listening now. "John Garnet," he repeated, "John Garnet," grinding the syllables between his teeth as he branded the name into his memory.

"Look out, John Garnet, and keep your hands up the first time you come across Abner Gale!"

Katerfelto had seen too much of mankind, and their worst passions, to be easily moved; but he felt his blood curdle while he marked the Parson's rubicund cheek turn to a sallow white. If ever there was murder in a man's face, he read it now. Perhaps for one short moment he felt compunction, but the weakness was soon over. "He is better

AS HE BRANDED THE NAME INTO HIS MEMORY.

out of the way," thought Katerfelto, "and things must take their course."

Thus it fell out that the West-country parson was riding steadily homewards over Marlborough Downs the same evening Lord Bellinger's coach was rifled by the gipsies, and its owner left a captive in the thraldom of his own word of honour till the moon rose.

Notwithstanding the nature of his errand, Abner Gale seemed in high health and spirits.

It was delightful to breathe a free, fresh air, untainted by the smells of London—to see the sky come down to a wide horizon uninterrupted by streets and houses—to feel beneath him the strong elastic action of his good bay horse, and to taste at different halting-places a sound and wholesome ale unadulterated by the tricks of metropolitan trade. To use his own words, he was "as happy as a king," yet he never wavered for an instant in his merciless purpose, never hesitated as to how he should act when he came face to face with his foe!

Riding along the Down, the two subjects nearest his heart were his supper and his revenge.

The moon was sailing high and clear in an unclouded sky. Suddenly the Parson drew rein, sitting for an instant motionless as a statue; then, urging his horse with hand and heel, arrived at a gallop in the midst of the unaccountable little party, of which he had caught sight.

The scene was ridiculous, grotesque, strange enough for a dream. Two strapping servants in

bright liveries paced to and fro, looking thoroughly frightened and ashamed, none the less that both were armed to the teeth. A middle-aged person in faded finery sat on the ground apart, weeping feebly and wringing her hands. Five horses harnessed to a coach stood patiently on the solitary Down, while one lay dead at their feet; and inside the coach were a gentleman and lady calmly playing cards! Abner Gale, pulling up suddenly amongst them, created no little consternation. The footmen went down on their knees, the middle-aged person screamed and fell on her back, the horses pricked their ears and snorted, while a quiet voice inside the coach was heard to exclaim, "*Re-pique*, my lady! What? Another gentleman of the road, and on a bay horse this time! Perhaps, sir, before proceeding to business you will kindly allow us to finish our game!"

Lord Bellinger played a winning card, and thrust his head out of window, laughing heartily at the discomfiture of his domestics.

"Can I help you?" said the new arrival in his rough blunt tones. "I am an honest man enough as times go. A poor West-country parson, at your service, and my name is Abner Gale."

"Mr. Gale," replied his lordship, taking off his hat, "let me present you to Lady Bellinger. If you are of the church militant, reverend sir, you should have been here an hour or two ago; you might have seen some fine sport, and taken a turn at it yourself, to the tune of 'Wigs on the Green.' It's too late now, but I think we could

have told a different story could I have found something like a *man* to back me up!"

If levelled at his servants, the taunt fell harmless. Their wits were still abroad, but they felt comforted and reassured to learn that the second highwayman was but a parson after all!

"Have you met with an accident, my lord?" asked Gale, with a clumsy bow, "ill-usage, or misadventure of any kind? Command my services, I beg, on behalf of yourself and her ladyship."

"The moon! the moon!" exclaimed Lady Bellinger, much to the Parson's disturbance, who thought she had gone mad. "It's over the tree! It's eleven o'clock! Don't stop another minute! Let us drive to the inn at once, and try to forget,—only I never shall forget this dreadful night!"

So my lord and the servants, with the powerful assistance of their new auxiliary, got the heavy coach once more into motion, my lady so far remembering the Parson's existence as to entreat that he would ride close beside the wheel, and, if need be, defend them with his life!

The procession soon reached its destination, the same inn at which John Garnet had dined. Driving into the yard without its full complement of horses, the servants in a high state of excitement, everybody talking at once, it was obvious the coach had been attacked by a highwayman. The old ostler smiled and winked, the landlord smiled and looked at his wife, the wife smiled and

shook her head, the cook smiled, the scullions smiled, everybody seemed interested and well pleased, more particularly when it transpired that the assailant, having taken what he wanted, had made his escape uninjured by so much as a scratch. None seemed astonished when his lordship, inquiring eagerly for particulars as to the robber and his grey horse, mentioned that the only clue he had obtained to his identity was the name of Galloping Jack. The landlord, of course, knew nothing. A landlord never does know anything. The ostler, on cross-examination by the stupidest of Lord Bellinger's footmen, had no recollection of any grey horse in particular. So many grey horses were put in their stables, coming and going to Marlborough market and what not. How was he to distinguish which was which? While the maids, preparing my lady's chamber, and airing my lady's bed, furnished Mistress Rachel with so marvellous an account of Galloping Jack, his exploits and enormities, that the waiting gentlewoman could not mention his name without a shudder, connecting him, by some inexplicable process of reasoning, with all the myths and terrible personages she had ever heard of, such as St. George and the Dragon, Blue-beard, and Herod of Jewry, surnamed the Great.

But Abner Gale, who accepted his lordship's invitation to supper, and cracked a bottle with him afterwards, though he prudently excused himself from playing cards, had a clear remembrance of the noted grey horse, whose speed

and endurance were once the topic of every market-table and every drinking bout in his own country. From Lord Bellinger's description of the animal on which his assailant was mounted; and which, by all the rules of gaming, my lord considered his own property, the Parson gathered that it could be none other than the famous grey, and that its rider must have been the celebrated highwayman, whose features were always masked, but whose figure was so well known at all fairs, races, cock-fights, and other sporting or social gatherings in the West. Parson Gale, indeed, had only seen the horse once, and then for an instant, dismounted, as it was led off to the stable, but his admiring eye had taken its whole frame in at a glance, and he could recall its make and shape, its points and action, as vividly as those of his own good nag that he had ridden many scores and hundreds of miles.

"I always understood the man was hanged," murmured the Parson, as he laid his head on his pillow, "but I should know the horse among ten thousand!"

CHAPTER XIV

LESS THAN KIN

AGAIN is Nelly Carew sitting among the rocks in Porlock Bay; but the tide is out now, and a broad sweep of wet sand stretches before her to a low and level line of white that seems receding farther and farther towards the chalk-bluffs of the distant Welsh coast. The faint moan of the ebb is melancholy enough, and heavy clouds gathering down Channel, against the wind, denote a coming storm, but gleams of sun are still slanting athwart them in pale shafts of light, and there is a colour in Nelly's cheek, a lustre in her eye, little in accordance with the dull stagnation of slack water, the heavy atmosphere of a thunderstorm, speaking rather of bright thoughts, tranquil happiness, the spring-tide of health and youth and hope.

Keen observers might indeed detect a shade more colour than usual in the soft cheeks, a deeper blue in the speaking eyes; but when young

women sit by the sea in pleasant company, such tokens are neither unusual nor out of place.

And Nelly Carew is not alone. By the merest accident—for how could he tell that this was her favourite haunt in the afternoon?—a gentleman with whom she had lately made acquaintance happened to stroll in the same direction as herself. Two lonely figures, breaking the solitude of a wide level seaboard, if they have ever met before, cannot avoid each other without rudeness. A start—a stop—a bow—a little hesitation on one side, a little blushing on the other, and John Garnet found himself seated on a slab of rock at Nelly Carew's feet, looking dreamily out to seaward, exceedingly well satisfied with his place.

The exploit and accompanying outrage, of which Galloping Jack must henceforth bear the blame, had been thoroughly carried out. The warrants were burnt, the attainted persons warned in time to escape. Some had fled the country—all had taken precautions for their own safety; and, thanks to Katerfelto's speed and endurance, so quickly had this been done, so suddenly had the assailant of Marlborough Downs shown himself in the market-place at Taunton, that, like Dick Turpin of immortal memory, he might have proved an *alibi* in any court of law, thanks to the extraordinary powers of his steed. Many an honest West-country gentleman made it an excuse for an extra glass, now that, after the King's health (not specified by name), he must devote a bumper to Galloping Jack and the good grey horse! But John Garnet was acute enough

to leave on the shoulders of that mysterious highwayman the whole burden of guilt he had incurred in the eyes of justice. From his neighbours over the border, in his own North country, he had learnt the wisdom of an excellent maxim, "Jouk an' let the jaw gae bye!" In other words, "Duck your head, and keep under shelter till the storm be past."

He might remain in hiding, he thought, among these western wilds till the indignation of the Government had blown over, the hue-and-cry become somewhat dulled. Then he hoped to get quietly on board a fishing-boat, put out into the wide Atlantic, and so, working his way back again up Channel, land in safety at some port on the coast of France. In the meantime all he had to do was to keep quiet, and leave the grey horse shut up in the stable as much as possible. Casting about for a harbour of refuge, he hit upon the little village of Porlock, a cluster of houses embosomed in wooded hills, washed by silver waves, shut in from all the world by moor and mountain, purple peak, and bare grey headland, clothed in tropical vegetation, calm, beautiful, and secluded as the first Paradise of mankind. Here he thought he would be secure and tranquil. Here he determined to take refuge for days and weeks, if only he could endure the dull, cheerless monotony to which he must make up his mind. That he should find a soul to speak to he had never anticipated, much less did he dream that here was his Fate, waiting for him with her soft blue eyes, in this peaceful little hamlet down by the Severn Sea.

For exercise of the good horse, he would ride Katerfelto on the sands at midnight, but a man of his habits could not remain indoors all day. Soon gathering courage from impunity, he would leave his humble lodgings betimes to wander about the neighbourhood, drinking in its beauty, making himself familiar with every winding coomb, darkling forest, and stretching moorland for half a score of miles around.

Thus it fell out that, returning from one of these expeditions at sunset, he overtook Nelly's grandfather, very infirm and feeble now, toiling painfully down a steep incline towards his home.

John Garnet was essentially good-natured, with that good-nature which springs from a good heart. In an instant he had offered the old man his arm, and Nelly, who went out to meet him, was not a little surprised to see her grandfather leaning on a straight-made, handsome young fellow, in an embroidered waistcoat and laced hat, talking volubly, and to all appearance much pleased with his new acquaintance.

If she thought the stranger good-looking (she declared afterwards she never thought about it at all), be sure she did not admit so much, even to herself, though conscious she was pleased—a feeling she attributed to the improvement in her grandfather's spirits, and his obvious delight in his new friend's society.

Old Carew, shut out for so many years from the conversation of such men as himself, men of action and adventure, men of the busy world, felt like the blind restored to sight when he heard

once more the familiar tones, the familiar terms, that took him back a score of years at least. It was pleasant to recognise the well-remembered trick of phrase and gesture that is not to be caught by imitation nor purchased second-hand. "The man's a gentleman," thought old Carew, "a *real* gentleman ; and how unlike Parson Gale!"

He bade him stay to supper, of course. He opened in his honour one of the dozen bottles of choice Rhine wine that had lasted as many years. He chatted, he chuckled, he coughed and wheezed, and told his stories and fought his battles, and enjoyed his evening thoroughly, while Nelly sat silent at her needle-work, grateful to the visitor who made grandfather so happy.

John Garnet was a good listener, none the less perhaps that his attention often wandered to the blue eyes in the corner of the room, eyes that rarely met his own, and when they did were immediately cast down ; but he put in his exclamations of astonishment, admiration, and approval at the right places, sympathising with the old man's memories, gentle to his foibles, tolerant of his garrulity—and all honour to him for it, say I.

You do not know what it is to live in the past, you young men who still possess the illimitable inheritance of the future, an account that it seems impossible to overdraw. Even the present is hardly good enough to satisfy you, and you cheat yourselves out of no little happiness by anticipating to-morrow, when you should be content with the enjoyment of to-day. But wait a few years, wait till the to-morrows begin to look scantier and

scantier, while the yesterdays are counted by thousands—wait till all that made the pride, the excitement, the happiness of life, is an experience, and not a hope—till the good horse has been forgotten by all but yourself—the true love has been cold in her grave for years—the very laurels you have won are become withered garlands, put away in some neglected hiding-place, only to be brought out again when the mourners hang them round your tomb! Then you will know the happiness of living once more, if only for an hour, if only till the glass is empty or the tobacco burnt to ashes, in the glowing, thrilling memories of an imperishable past. Imperishable, for is it not, in truth, the only reality? Imperishable, for it cleaves to us during life. Imperishable, for we are taught to believe that it goes with us into eternity.

You may make an old man happy at trifling cost, if you will only yield a few minutes of patient attention while he wanders back through its well-remembered maze, and loses himself dreamily in the labyrinth we call life.

Nelly never knew her grandfather so communicative. He talked till he was thoroughly tired out. Marlborough, Prince Eugene, the vineyards of France, the swamps of the low countries, London coffee-houses, foreign theatres, dice, duelling, midnight revels, and the fierce joys of the old roaring Mohock days—he had something to recall of each, and seemed nothing loath to embark on his adventurous godless career once again.

But his voice grew weaker, his chin sank on his breast, the light in his eye, that had flickered up in transient gleams, dimmed visibly, and the guest, resisting his host's quavering entreaties to remain, discreetly took leave, thereby earning golden opinions of Nelly Carew. She opened the door for him herself. She even condescended to shake hands, and wished him good-night, with a grateful smile. Walking home to his lodgings, through the balmy summer air, with slow and lingering steps, John Garnet began to think that his term of retirement would be no such dreary penance after all; that, under certain conditions, a man might do worse that settle down to vegetate at Porlock for the rest of his life.

Had he forgotten Waif? No! he told himself. A thousand times, no! He was grateful to her; he was interested in her; he pitied the girl from his heart; but hers was not the whisper that seemed floating on the night breeze in his ear, and it was a pair of blue eyes that peered at him out of the twilight gloom whichever way he turned. Blue eyes, calm, deep, and beautiful as the summer sky and the summer sea.

We ought to be ashamed of ourselves, but, alas! there is too much truth in the adage, "We always believe our first love is our last, and our last love our first!"

John Garnet was like the rest of mankind. Still, it had not come to that yet.

So pleasant an introduction, and under such conditions, soon ripened into something more than acquaintance. It was not long before John

Garnet and Nelly Carew became fast friends. They were surprised to find how many tastes they had, how many sympathies and ideas, in common. Sitting together on that bare ledge of rock amongst the sand, though a week ago they had been utter strangers, each seemed to have known the other for years.

When a man and his wife are silent while together, they have generally quarrelled and are not going to make up; but when two young people of opposite sexes, who have never broached the subject of matrimony, sit together out of doors without opening their lips, there is a strong likelihood that they are progressing insensibly towards that holy state in which they will have a legal right to hate each other as much as they please!

It may be that she was the one who felt their silence most irksome, but the girl broke it at last with the following feminine piece of injustice—

"How dull you must find it here after the life you've been accustomed to! I'm sure I wonder you don't have a fit of the spleen. I've heard grandfather say he felt it dreadfully at first."

"Mistress Carew," he answered,—while the blue eyes shot a reproachful glance, that almost said, Why don't you call me Nelly?—"Mistress Carew, I am *not* your grandfather!"

"You've been grave enough," she replied, with a little nervous laugh, "this while past, to be anybody's grandfather. I've been wondering what you could see down Channel yonder that seemed to take up all your attention!"

This ought to have been encouraging. She was watching him, then, following the direction of his eyes, trying to make out his thoughts. Strange to say, John Garnet, usually so debonair and ready of speech, seemed at a loss for a reply.

"I was wondering,"—he hesitated, and looked down, while Nelly, whose work had been idly folded in her lap, began plying her needle very fast,—"I was wondering whether it could really be less than a week since I first came to Porlock?"

She had been pondering the same marvel herself, but took care not to express her astonishment.

"It's not—not at all the kind of place you expected, is it?"

Nelly thought it strange that her heart should beat, and her breath come quick, in asking so simple a question.

He tried to catch her eye, but she steadily refused to look at him, while he answered, "I thought it would be a prison and a purgatory. I never dreamed it was to prove a Para"—

He stopped short without finishing the word, for she had grown deadly pale, and her blue eyes, looking over his head at something beyond and behind him, were dilated with actual fear. Turning in the same direction, he could detect no more alarming object than a stout, square-built man, in a black riding-suit, walking leisurely towards them through the soft sand.

"Good-morrow, Mistress Carew," said Abner Gale's harsh voice, while the scowl that accompanied his greeting gave it more the character of

a ban than a blessing. "They told me in the village I should find you here or hereabouts, but I didn't think to see you so well attended. My service to *you*, sir," scanning John Garnet from head to foot. "A warm day this, but pleasant enough to be taking a young woman a walk by the seashore."

There was something offensive in the man's tone and manner. At any other time John Garnet would probably have resented his intrusion on the spot, but his attention was now so entirely taken up with Nelly's discomposure, that he failed to notice those indications of a wish to brawl, which he was generally only too ready to indulge.

Parson Gale was indeed in the worst of humours. Only the night before he had reached his home, and yet no sooner had he broken his morning fast than, after a visit to his Spanish pointer, a cursory glance at his Irish pigs, but taking no thought whatever for his Devonshire parish, he was in the saddle again to get a glimpse of Nelly Carew. Following the devious tracks of Exmoor, with the instinct of the wild sheep, the wild ponies, or the wilder red deer, he threaded the coomb into Badgeworthy, crossed its foaming waters at his accustomed ford, climbed and clattered among the rocks, cantered freely over the heather, and paced down the hill into Porlock like a man in a dream—for his whole mind was filled with the fair face and the blue eyes that he had hungered to look on for weeks. Though familiar with every acre of the forest and

the moor, he would never have reached his destination but that his horse knew the way as well as his master, having travelled it many a time of late.

It was characteristic of the man that he should not have ridden straight to old Carew's cottage, and gone frankly in to see his friends. He stabled his horse instead at a little farm on the outskirts of the village, and hovered stealthily about its vicinity, hoping to meet someone who would tell him how matters had been going on in his absence.

He did not remain long in suspense. Ere half an hour elapsed a shambling, ill-looking youth, wearing "poacher" written in every line of his face as plain as print, slouched up and touched his hat, waiting, however, to be questioned, with an awkward grin that denoted how his natural insolence was kept in check by the Parson's quick temper and reputation for physical prowess. "He be soon up, be wor Pa'yson," was the verdict of his parishioners, "and main ready with his hands, right or w'hrong."

"What, Ike!" said Mr. Gale, assuming a cordiality he did not feel, for, to do him justice, he hated a poacher, especially in the vicinity of deer; "not hanged yet, nor even sent to Botany Bay? What hast been doing, then, these so many weeks? Has it been slack time with thee while I've been away?"

"Much as usual, Pa'yson," answered Ike, in the broadest dialect of West Somerset, which it is needless to reproduce here. "It's you gentle-

folk that knows what change means. Frolics, too. There's not much of that for poor chaps like us!"

"What! Is there no news in the place, then?" asked the Parson. "Never a fresh nag in Farmer Veal's stable? Never a strange face stopped to take a drink of cider at the Wheat Sheaf or the Crown?"

Small as it was, Porlock boasted two beershops, and Ike was familiar with both.

"There be one strange face," answered the latter, with a cunning leer; "but it's little cider that gets inside of *he*—beer neither. The best of wine in his glass, and the best of nags in his stable, gold lace on his coat, fine linen on his back, a sword in his belt, and a warm welcome from the likeliest lass in the West Country—that's what he has. Folks like me must put up with a drink of cider, when they can get it. I'm main thirsty now, Pa'yson."

"What do you mean?" asked Gale, in no little disquietude, but putting silver, nevertheless, in the other's dirty hand.

"They say he do be a kinsman of Mistress Nelly, for sure," answered Ike. "And it's like enough. They can't let him be, neither her nor the old man, by day or night. I do know well he do be in and out of the house at all hours, like a dog in a fair."

Roused beyond endurance, the Parson clutched his heavy riding-whip; and, but that he bit his lip till the blood came in an effort to control himself, would have given his informant the full benefit of its weight.

Ike never knew how near he was having his head broke then and there.

"Do you mean that old Master Carew has a kinsman paying him a visit?" he asked; and while he spoke Abner Gale wondered at the resolution with which he kept down his wrath. "When did he come, lad? can ye tell, now? And how soon is he going away?"

But Ike, whose fingers were itching to spend in drink the money he had earned so easily, did not care to sustain further cross-examination.

"Them sort comes and goes like the shadows on Brendon Moor," said he. "It's you and me, Master Gale, no offence, as stands to it, blow high blow low, like Dunkerry Beacon. I don't want to breed no mischief, and I don't want to tell no lies. There's others can say more than me. My service to you, Pa'yson, and thanking you kindly. If you've an odd job for a poor chap, I'm to be heard of mostly at the Wheat Sheaf; and I'll not forget to drink your honour's good health."

Thus speaking, Ike slunk off; and the Parson, with scowling brows, proceeded to Nelly's favourite haunt by the seashore.

What a bright fresh morning it had been when he heard the lark singing on Exmoor a few short hours ago! Was it the gathering thunderstorm that made the sky so dark, the air so stifling, now?

A woman's tact seldom fails her at need. Mistress Nelly's greeting was just sufficiently cordial to soothe the Parson into decent behaviour,

without exceeding the limits of such kindly reception as seemed due to her grandfather's friend. Ere John Garnet had ceased wondering what there was in this new-comer to move her so much, she had cleared her brows, steadied her voice, and extended her hand with a pleasant smile. At that moment, perhaps, the Parson knew for the first time, by the jealousy she was capable of arousing, how fiercely he loved her. And it may have been at the same moment that John Garnet discovered something he had never realised before.

An ass between two bundles of hay has always been accepted as the illustration of a false position. Surely a young lady with an admirer on each hand, one of whom she knows she hates, while the other she dreads to acknowledge she is beginning to like, must be equally at a loss on which side to incline. What is she to say or leave unsaid? What is she to do or leave undone? Nelly Carew wished John Garnet had never come; wished he would go away; wished a spring-tide would flow in that moment and float the Parson bodily up to Bossington Point, down to Barnstaple Bay, out into the wide Atlantic, where she might never set eyes on him again! Succour came when most she wanted it. A few heavy drops, a gust of wind, a flash and a thunder-roll. In five minutes it was obvious that unless they hastened back to the village all three would be drenched to the skin. With an imploring look at John Garnet, she made him understand he was to leave her without asking

why. How delightful it was to feel that he caught her meaning at once, and obeyed! Then she hurried the Parson to her grandfather's cottage, at a pace that admitted of no explanation; and once over the threshold, disappeared in her own chamber, with that plea of headache (thunder always gave her a headache) which must have been Eve's excuse when she did not want to work in the garden with Adam.

Finding he was not likely to see her again, Abner Gale made but a short visit. As he rode home across Exmoor the sky was clear, the birds were singing, the long rank grass sprang fresh and green from its recent wetting, flags and rushes were dressed out with raindrops glistening like jewels in the afternoon sun. But the Parson rode slowly and heavily, looking steadfastly between his horse's ears. Now and again he shook his head, or bit his lip, or glared round him with a troubled scowl, suggestive of annoyance and apprehension, as if he doubted there was still thunder in the air.

CHAPTER XV

MORE THAN KIND

"HE understood me at once," thought Nelly, whose headache left her the moment she entered her own room. "How gentle he always seems, and how nice! I wonder who and what he is? Grandfather says there can be no mistake about his being well born, and a man of fashion. Parson Gale often boasts *he* is not a man of fashion; but I know I like a man of fashion best. I wonder when I shall see him again. Not that I want to see him one bit; only he must have thought me so rude to leave like that, and I ought to explain. How angry Mr. Gale looked, and how cross he seemed all the way home! What does it matter to me? What need I care how cross he is? Only—only I wish I was never going to set eyes on him again!"

Now this was hardly justice—perhaps I should rather say it was woman's justice. In the absence of other society, the time had been when Nelly was well pleased to accept, in a dignified distant kind of way, the Parson's homage, and felt flattered, if not gratified, by his obvious devotion to herself; now she seemed instinctively to shrink

from him as from an enemy. And why? Because John Garnet had merry eyes and a ruddy cheek? Because he was the first specimen of his class she had ever met? Or because they were thrown together, two comely young people, in this pretty little village by the sea? She could not have given a reason—no more can I.

Twenty-four hours did not elapse, of course, before they met again. She looked timidly in his face, and put out her hand. He might be offended, she thought, and felt rather disappointed to have no opportunity of begging pardon; but his frank and pleasant manner was so reassuring, that she wondered how she could have dreaded their meeting so much, and why she spent all the morning thinking of it. Nelly was always wondering now, and for the first time in her life had forgotten to take grandfather's posset off the hob last night before it was smoked.

It is no doubt provoking not to be able to irritate a man if you wish; but Nelly had hardly yet arrived at that stage in the malady which desires a quarrel for the pleasure of making up.

"You—you didn't get wet," she said timidly, "when we were all obliged to hurry home yesterday? The showers here are very heavy, and apt to—to"—

"Wet a man to the skin," he said, laughing; "so they are everywhere else. I was sorry to lose your pleasant society, Mistress Carew; but, thinking the strange gentleman might be an old friend of your grandfather, I did not

wish to intrude, and walked home as fast as I could."

She shot a grateful glance at him. "Yes," she observed, in rather a marked tone, "he *is* a friend of grandfather's rather than of mine, though I have known him ever since I was a little girl."

"Is that so very long, Mistress Carew?" he asked, with another of his pleasant smiles.

They were walking through the orchard behind her home, along a path that led to the shore. She stopped and plucked some wild-flowers from the hedge, perhaps to hide a blush.

"I have a favour to ask you," she said, in a low voice, and stooping her head over the posy. "Do not say Mistress Carew—I don't like it. I had rather *you* would call me Nelly."

There was the least possible inflection of voice on the pronoun, just enough to make John Garnet's heart beat as it had never beat before.

"Nelly," he repeated, "will you give me one of those flowers?"

"You may take the whole bunch," she answered; "I only gathered them for you." But she walked on so fast after this gratifying avowal that it was impossible to tell her one word of the old tale that was rising to his lips.

All that day she took care not to be alone with him another minute. From the orchard she took him to the beach, where the villagers were collecting seaweed; thence to a field

where harvest was already nearly done; home by the cow-house, with its attendant milkmaid; and so back to grandfather's parlour, where she poured out his evening draught of cider with her own hands.

Why Nelly should have cried like a naughty child when she laid her head on the pillow; why she should have woke before daybreak, and risen at sunrise to put new ribbons in her dress of a colour she had lately heard somebody say he liked, is more than I can take upon me to explain. I can understand, however, why John Garnet lay a-bed longer than usual that same morning, and turned on the other side, hoping to go to sleep again, that he might dream another dream like the last about Nelly Carew.

Abner Gale's dreams, if he had any, would seem to have been of no such pleasant nature, for he was stirring with the dawn, breakfasting fiercely before sunrise on Devonshire mutton and strong ale, cursing, notwithstanding his profession, each of his servants in turn for imputed shortcomings, from his cherry-cheeked parlour-maid to the man who fed the pigs. In and out the house, and through the precincts of the farmyard, or "barton," as he called it, the master's eye was only less dreaded than his tongue, his tongue than his hand. Yet was he well served too, with the scrupulous obedience of fear.

He would fain have mounted his horse and ridden across the moor in the direction of Porlock again to-day, but even Abner Gale was

compelled to pay some respect to the decencies of life, and even such a parish as his exacted a few hours' attention after an absence of weeks.

There were conditions to be written out for a wrestling-match between two rival champions; arrangements to be made for supplying the ringers with unlimited cider at their approaching feast; a badger recently drawn, to visit; and some terrier-puppies just opening their eyes on this wicked world, to inspect.

Also there was a child to be baptized, a matter that would keep, and a wench to be married, a matter that *would not*.

"For to-day," thought the Parson, "I have got my hands full; to-morrow I shall be free again, and it's strange if I fail to find out something more of your goings-on, Mistress Nelly, and put a spoke in the wheel of that young spark down by the waterside, who seems to make himself so much at home!"

Though he never saw him before, though he had not the vaguest notion that John Garnet was the man he had sworn to hunt to death, some antagonistic instinct caused him to hate this man with a deadly hatred, scarcely to be accounted for even by that jealousy which is proverbially cruel as the grave.

In no appropriate frame of mind, the Parson was about to don his frayed and dirty canonicals for administration of that matrimonial rite it would be unwise to delay, when his quick eye caught sight of a man riding on the moor, whose appearance caused him to cast aside his

sacred vestments with an oath, and rush to the door, carrying a brimming jug of cider in his hand.

Mr. Gale swore when he was pleased and when he was angry, when he rode and when he walked, when he worked and when he rested. Altogether he swore a good deal between morning and night.

"It's the harbourer!" he exclaimed, steadying the vessel not to spill a drop; "the harbourer, as I'm a living sinner. Red Rube!" he shouted, while the new arrival drew the rein at the mounting block, "stop and wet your whistle — you're always welcome, and you're always dry!"

Red Rube, whose real name was Reuben Rudd, needed no second bidding. Raising the jug to his weather-tanned face, he took a hearty pull, a pull that nearly emptied its contents.

The Parson scanned him approvingly. Rube wiped his mouth on his sleeve, and sat motionless in the saddle without a word.

He was a man of seventy at least, short, shrunken, withered, and tough as shoe-leather, with a keen grey eye, set in countless wrinkles, that seemed traced in the red-brown skin with the point of a needle. He rode a broken-kneed Exmoor pony, low in condition, but as hard as nails. Sportsman was written in every line of his face, every turn of his limbs, yet his steed, saddle, bridle, and the clothes on his back would have been dear at five pounds.

Like a ghost, it was Rube's custom not to

speak till he was spoken to. His answers, too, were ghostly and mysterious, and he loved to vanish like a ghost when he had delivered his pithy say.

Presently, in such a whisper as denotes respectful confidence, the Parson broke silence.

"Three inches?" he asked, with the utmost concern.

"And a quarter," was the reply. "Twenty-two score and maybe a pound over. The slot was less than an hour old at sunrise."

"Rights?" asked the Parson.

"A warrantable deer," answered Rube, and each mused in silence for more than a minute.

"It's a pity," observed the Parson, after a pause; "there's no knowing where he may get to by next week. These heavy deer travel a long way when they're not hurried. It's hard to say where he may be when we want him. There ought to be no Sundays in the hunting season."

So self-evident a proposition seemed not to require assent; Red Rube held his peace, and looked at the empty cider jug. Taking the hint, Gale entered the house, and returned with it refilled. The old man's eye glittered, and he indulged in another pull. It seemed to loosen his tongue. "That be main good zider," said he, shortening his reins and applying his one spur to the pony's ribs, as though to depart, but turning in his saddle, with an after-thought, for a few last words.

"I wur down Lapford way yesterday," said he

with a chuckle, "and hoam by Rose Ash. I larned reading, Pa'yson, threescore years ago and more, afore I took to the deer. There's money to be made by reading, I tell'ee, and money means drink."

"What do you mean?" asked Gale.

"I mean there's handbills up at both places, offering a hundred guineas reward; that's what I mean," replied the old man, kindling to excitement. "Him as rode the grey stallion has been about again. Galloping Jack they always called 'un that spoke of 'un to me—and if a man could steal a view of 'un, or get the wind of 'un, or so much as slot 'un where he harbours, 'tis a hundred golden guineas paid down in hand. I've moved many a right stag in my time, Master Gale, but never such a noble head as that."

Then, as fearing his loquacity must have compromised him in the eyes of so good a sportsman, Red Rube departed at a gallop, and was seen no more.

Abner Gale looked after him with a smile. Lord Bellinger, then, had taken his advice, and adopted the most likely means of bringing to justice the perpetrator of an outrage that was both highway robbery and high treason. It interested the Parson but little save in so far as the grey horse was concerned. If its rider should come to the gallows, he would do all he knew to put that noble beast in his own stable. In imagination he was already galloping it over Exmoor to go and see Nelly Carew.

Then the Parson sighed and swore, and sighed

again, and put on his dingy cassock to marry the tardy couple who had waited so long.

He tied them up, however, fast and sure, before the stroke of noon, pocketing his fees with considerable satisfaction, for Mr. Gale took no delight in the gratuitous administrations of the Church, little thinking that, even while he pronounced the blessing, which it did not strike him seemed a mockery from such lips as his, John Garnet was turning out into the sunshine, fresh and fair, like a bridegroom himself, to wait upon Mistress Carew.

That gentleman lay long in bed without dreaming the pleasant dream again, so bethought him at last that it would be more to the purpose to rise and pursue the reality than lose his time in sighing after the shadow. He was very far gone now. The posy she had given him stood in water at his bedside, every hour of the day seemed wasted that was not spent with this blue-eyed girl, and he never gave Waif a thought for more than a moment at a time.

Bold, blithe, and buoyant, he whistled a merry air as he strode up the village street, thinking of his first, last love, like a cock-bird in full plumage going to look for its mate. He seemed to moult a feather or two, though, as he passed the village stocks, on the posts of which, for want of a more prominent elevation, were posted two conspicuous handbills, beginning with a gigantic "Whereas," and continuing through a long and minute description of his own person, to the offer of one hundred guineas for his capture, dead or alive;

the whole concluding with a flourish, in capital letters, to the glory of "Our Sovereign Lord the King."

He went on to see Nelly all the same, but resolved that he would put off to a more convenient season something he meant to have told her to-day.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HARBOURER

NATURE is always beautiful in her morning, evening, and noonday dresses, her fits of rage, her languor of repose, her storms, her calms, her shadows, sunshine, tears, and smiles; but never perhaps are we so conscious of her charms as when abroad before day-break, in a mountainous country, we see her growing, line by line, out of darkness into day.

First, through the hush of night, there steals a cool, soft breath, like the sigh of some spirit of morning longing for the dawn. Soon, swelling to a breeze, it stirs the cloud on the moor, the leaf in the copse. A bird awakes and twitters in its nest. Anon, in joyful chorus, answering notes pipe shrill and clear through all the woodland, while a pale streak of light, low and level on the eastern ridges, peeps above the sky-line. Great black masses stand out from the gloom, in deeper shadows and broader touches, soon to resolve

themselves, as the eye masters their shapes, into rock and coomb, hill, valley, and hanging wood. But now the pale streak has changed to crimson, underlined with a yellow seam, the mountain puts on his crown of fire, and the highest tree-tops in glade and valley are tinged with flame, while, far and near, pointed peaks, rugged tors, purple heather, dusky moorland, all are tipped with gold. Then, in his blazing chariot, the lord of light comes up to run his course, and night is past, and man goes forth to his labour until the evening, and the harbourer's day's work is done.

Red Rube, if he worshipped the sun at all, worshipped him less in love than fear, dreading, above all things, that his beams should cause the dews to evaporate from the sward and harden into an unimpressionable surface the yielding clay beneath each sheltering bank or round each bubbling spring. Rube believed that, for beauty and majesty, no object in the world could vie with the beam and branches, the brow, bay, and tray of a warrantable deer, yet he had not been a nurse-child of Nature, in all her seasons and all her moods, without learning her lessons, and imbibing for his foster-mother an instinctive love, only the deeper that it was unconscious, unsuspected, and in spite of himself.

Is not this the secret of our attachment to field sports, and do not those which bring us face to face with Nature retain their fascination when every other pastime or excitement has palled on the satiated senses, the weary world-worn heart?

That noblest beast of chase, the wild stag, in

the West of England, has a lordly habit of feasting during night, and seeking repose in the small hours towards dawn of day. Gliding, like a ghost, through cornfield and orchard, he travels many a league after sundown, feeding on the best that moorland soil and scanty harvests can afford, nibbling the half-ripened ears on one hill-farm at midnight, flinging the turnips overhead in wasteful profusion on another, ten miles off, within an hour; seeking, before dawn, the shelter of some wooded coomb, in which he means to harbour, at an equal distance from both. Restless, wary, vigilant, he is always on the move, and habitually suspicious of an enemy. It is to master, by man's intellect, man's powers of observation, the superior speed, finer instinct, and craftier nature of the brute, that Red Rube has been after the deer from boyhood, acquiring in the experience of many seasons so intimate a knowledge of their haunts and habits, that, in spite of age, infirmity, and a confirmed tendency to drink, he has earned an unchallenged right to call himself the most skilful harbourer in the West.

The ground must indeed be hard, and the "slot," or print of the animal's feet, many hours' old to baffle Red Rube, who, stooping to the line like a bloodhound, reads off, as from a book, the size, sex, weight, and age of the passing deer, the pace at which it was travelling, its distance ahead, and the probability of its affording a run. Therefore it was his custom to be abroad long before daybreak, guiding his Exmoor pony, only less wise and wary than himself, through broken

paths and winding tracks, by bog, boulder, and precipice, with an instinct unerring as that of the wild animal he went to seek. In the first twilight of morning he would hobble the pony at the head of some remote coomb that bordered on the moor; and prowling stealthily down its windings, would begin his quest in the different haunts that he knew were frequented by deer. He seldom made a cast in vain. Ere the light was strong enough to distinguish it, he usually came upon the footprint of his game. Then he stopped, examined it carefully, pondered, and made up his mind. If the slot was three inches wide at the heel, after due allowance for nature of ground and rate of speed, it would be that of a six-year-old hart at least, carrying nine or ten branches on his two antlers, having, in forester's language, his rights, and to be described therefore as a warrantable deer. Such considerations would cause Rube to grin—he never laughed—and to take a pull at his flask.

Following up the track to some deep impervious woodland, in which it was again lost, he would make a circuit of many miles round its verge, with or without the pony, in order to make sure that his quarry had not gone on; and here an intimate acquaintance with its habits, and the passes through which it would be likely to emerge, saved him many an hour of fruitless search. Ere the sun was high he had so contracted the circle, by ascertaining where the stag was *not*, that he could point out the very copse, almost the very thicket, in which it lay ensconced.

Again, to use woodsman's language, he had fairly "harboured his deer."

Then Rube's responsibility was over and his day's work done.

Thus it fell out that on a cool grey morning, late in harvest, our harbourer, stooping and prying over a level glade of turf by the waterside, in the deep shadows of Horner Wood, came to a stop; and, kneeling down, began to examine very closely a track that seemed to have crossed the stream, and broken into a gallop towards the hill. It was no cloven foot; and, consequently, neither deer nor devil, as Rube observed to himself with a grim smile, but the hoof-mark of a horse, shod with iron, and going at speed; nor was this in any way remarkable, but that the shoes were forged by no West-country blacksmith, and Rube was far too practised a woodsman to pass such a slot without inquiry or remark.

"A horse," he muttered, "and a good one. Here's a stride of nigh six yards, and every foot down at once in a ring I could cover with my hat! And, here again, when the rider's hand turned him from that boggy bit, see how he cut the moss out of the bank, and sprang back to the turf as light as a brocket. But them shoes was never welded this side Taunton town. That's what beats me! Parson Gale? Well, the Parson it might be, only this is an up-country horse for sure. Up-country rider, too, or he would have turned into the wood 'stead of keeping the track. No. He's not heading for Exmoor, isn't this one. Maybe he'll double back before sun-up,

and I'll fresh find him here in the coomb, if I only keep quiet and lie close!"

So Rube put his ear to the ground, listened, grinned, took a suck at his flask, and coiled himself down, like some beast of prey, on the watch.

He did not wait long. His lair was hardly warm ere he started to his feet at a crashing of branches within a hundred yards, a bounce, a splash, an oath in a man's voice, and the snorting of a horse, plunging and struggling through a bog.

In the solitudes of the West, as in the Arabian desert, every man you meet must be a friend or enemy; but in Somerset and Devon, till you have proved him the latter, you believe him to be the former. Rube ran to help, and saw the best nag he had ever set eyes on up to his girths in a swamp, sinking deeper and deeper with every plunge.

The rider, already clear of his saddle, and embedded over his boots in the green yielding slime, did his best to aid and encourage his horse by word and gesture, but the bog became only deeper and softer with every struggle, while to turn back seemed as difficult, and almost as hazardous, as to charge through.

But that aid was near, a fossil man and horse, in perfect preservation, might have been found centuries hence in a stratum below the surface, puzzling the geologists of the future as to how they got there.

"Right hand, I tell 'ee! Push 'un to the right,

"Right hand I tell 'ee! push 'un to the right, man!"

man!" exclaimed Rube, springing eagerly from his lurking-place. "This patch o' flag be the only sound spot fur a landyard's round— Steady, lad! Let 'un catch wind theer a bit and he'll come through."

Presence of mind, that essential quality of a horseman, was never wanting to John Garnet. Guiding Katerfelto to the little knot of rushes indicated, which, true to their nature, afforded foothold where they grew, he paused for a breathing-space, ere, patting his horse's neck with a word of endearment, he roused him to another effort that, after a plunge or two, placed him in safety, with a bank of sound heather beneath his feet.

The grey trembled all over, his eye rolled, his nostril dilated; but, with a prolonged snort and a shake, he recovered his composure, rubbing his handsome head against his master as though to congratulate him on their joint escape. "We'll never go there again, my boy!" said the rider, whom this treacherous surface had so deceived, adding, as though he did well to be angry, "Why, it looks like the best bit of gallopin' ground in the whole coomb!"

Red Rube grinned. To one born and bred on Exmoor, this was a jest that palled with no amount of repetition. These tempting islands of greensward, smooth and level as a lake, while affording, indeed, but little firmer support, seem designed by nature to lure a horseman from another country to his downfall. But was this a horseman from another country? The harbourer's

keen grey eye had taken him in at a glance, just as it would have mastered the points, size, and weight of a warrantable deer in the brief second during which the creature bounded across a ride. From the lace on his hat to the spur on his soiled boot, Red Rube had reckoned up John Garnet, as it were, to the very counting of the buttons on his coat. From Katerfelto's taper muzzle, to the last hair in his tail, he had, in the same instant, so impressed the whole animal on his mind, that he could have sworn to its identity under any circumstances at any future time. It struck him, even while man and horse were struggling in the bog, that they answered the description of that highwayman for whose capture so large a reward was offered in the handbills; and it was from no considerations of humanity or fair play that the old man refrained from knocking the stranger on the head, when he had him at disadvantage, unhorsed and knee-deep in a slough.

His reasons were extremely practical. In the first place, he had no weapon with which he could hope to contend successfully against a younger and stronger man; in the second, he could not bring himself to believe that so experienced a West-country rider as Galloping Jack would have fallen into a trap like this. "A bog," as he said, "so black and ugly, that even Varmer Viall's cows, poor things, do have the sense to keep out!"

"Well, it might have been worse!" replied John Garnet good-humouredly, while he swung himself into the saddle, and put a crown-piece in

Red Rube's hand. "You halloaed in time, my friend, or I should have missed the rushes, and never got out at all. I am beholden to you, and I won't forget it. This is the best horse in England, and I wouldn't have done him a mischief for more money than you could count."

The old man's fingers closed readily on the silver. "You be making for Porlock!" said he. "You do seem strange hereabouts. My day's work is done, and I don't mind if I show you the way."

John Garnet laughed—"I know the way well enough," he answered. "But why should you have done work when most men are just going to begin?"

Red Rube's grey eye twinkled. He laid his horny hand on Katerfelto's mane, and looked in the rider's face with a cunning leer. "Every man to his trade," said he. "My business lies betwixt the dark and the daylight. Yours, maybe, takes you out of a warm bed when the moon's up. I've been backwards and forwards on the moor fifty years or more, and no harm come of it yet. It's safer riding, maybe, than the road."

"Not with such cursed bogs as these about," replied the other carelessly. "Bogs that would swallow a coach-and-six; only I don't suppose you ever saw a coach-and-six in this wild outlandish country!"

"You're a stranger, maybe?" asked Rube, sorely perplexed, for how could this horseman so resemble Galloping Jack, yet betray such practical

ignorance of the moor and its peculiarities? "A stranger from up the country, no doubt, though you do handle your horse prettily enough, and sit in your saddle like a rock. Maybe you never heard of 'slotting' a stag twenty score weight, with a back like a bullock, and all his rights fairly counted, into a lone quiet coomb, where you harboured him so close you could touch him with the top joint of a trout-rod? Maybe you never saw an old black-and-tan twenty-six-inch tufter, with long flapping ears and hanging jowl, as steady as a clock, and as wise as a bishop, snuffle and quest and traverse, till he owned the scent with a roar deeper, louder, fuller of music than the organ I heard in Exeter fifty years ago, when I was a boy. Maybe I'm only wasting my breath. You up-country gentlemen know nothing of our sport on the moor."

The spark had caught. That strange enthusiasm common to all votaries of the chase brightened John Garnet's eye, while he continued the other's narrative of an imaginary stag hunt.

"Then with a crash of broken twigs and leafy branches, up he starts from a brake of deep green hazels,—stares about him for half a minute, time enough to count his points, and look him over,—turns his head from side to side, displaying his mighty neck and noble width of beam, lays his antlers back, and leaves the wood at a springing trot, too proud to hurry himself, and deliberating calmly where he shall go next. Presently we lose sight of him, to emerge a mile off on the open moor. When he treads heather he

breaks into a gallop, and speeds away like an arrow from a bow. You have moved him fairly now. Take up your tufters and let us lay on the pack."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Rube, holding his breath in sheer excitement. "You've been there before, I'll wager a gallon!"

"Talk of music and the organ in Exeter Cathedral!" proceeded John Garnet, "thirty couple of such voices as these would silence a battery of cannon. They spread like a lady's fan; they swarm like a hive of bees. Soon they settle into their places and stream across the moor, like horses in stride and speed, like lions in strength and energy and fierce desire for blood. Now's your time, old man. You sit down in your saddle and say to yourself, there is nothing on earth worth living for compared to such moments as these."

"*My* work is over when you come to that," said Rube, adding respectfully, "You're a true sportsman, sir. If I do know how to harbour a stag, you do know how to hunt him, I'll warrant. Yet I never saw you out with us on the moor here, as I can call to mind."

"Do you think there is no hunting but in the West?" replied John Garnet. "We have red deer in my country, and hounds that can set them up to bay. Horses, too, and men who dare ride them as straight as a bird of the air can fly. There's many a horn wound, and many a pair of spurs going from morning till night, all the season through, in the canny North."

"Like enough!" answered Rube. "But I'll always maintain that the moor is the moor. When your honour has once forded Badgeworthy water, you'll never want to follow hounds in any other country again."

"And that shall be before I am many days older," replied John Garnet, reflecting what an agreeable addition to the amusements of his retirement would be this favourite pursuit; and remembering also, no doubt, that Mistress Carew, on the wonderful white pony that fed in the orchard, was a keen votary of the chase. "Do *you* find a good stag, and, unless we get into a bog again, my grey horse and I will try to see him killed."

"I'll do my best," said Rube; and, with a clumsy obeisance, turned back towards the moor, looking after John Garnet's figure as it disappeared amongst the giant stems of Horner Wood with a puzzled expression on his quaint old face. This frank, well-spoken stranger was a riddle he could not read; a slot, as he would have expressed it, that left him at fault. The man might be a robber and an outlaw; but at anyrate he rode to admiration, was cordial, open-handed, and a sportsman to the backbone.

CHAPTER XVII

"LISTEN AND LEARN IT"

"AND you never told me your life was in danger, never said that a careless word might ruin both of us at a blow. Dear heart, surely you might have trusted *me*."

It was Nelly Carew's voice, and her brow was pressed to John Garnet's shoulder while she spoke. The red-cheeked apples hanging overhead in her grandfather's orchard had ripened less quickly under a hot harvest sun than the love that a few short days brought to maturity in the maiden's heart. She could not believe that a month ago she had never so much as heard of the man whose presence now seemed a condition of existence, like the very air she breathed. Could she be the same Nelly Carew whose whole being was once engrossed in grandfather's posset and the incubations of the speckled hen? Or was it all a dream? If a dream, she only prayed she might never wake again.

"Why should I have told you?" he asked. "I could but make you anxious and unhappy, dearest; we have surely enough of difficulty and vexation as it is. Besides," he added, in a

higher tone, "how was I to know, Nelly, that you liked me well enough to care?"

There came a very kind look in the blue eyes —"Didn't you guess?" she whispered softly. "Didn't you think it very strange of me, that day, when I gave you the posy out of the hedge?"

There is a pleasant fiction amongst lovers, that the tender passages to which they constantly refer must have taken place in the remote past. Nelly spoke of *that* day as if the time since elapsed was to be counted by years, instead of hours.

"I thought you the dearest, and the best, and the loveliest girl on earth!" was the appropriate reply; "and now I could almost find it in my heart to wish we had never met. For *your* sake, Nelly, not for mine—not for mine."

They were the old conventional words which have probably been the prelude to every rupture of attachments since men grew weary and women false; yet it was impossible to look in John Garnet's face, or listen to the tone of his voice, and doubt that this was the outcry of an unselfish heart, so loving, that it longed for the happiness of another rather than its own.

Nelly's eyes filled with tears. "I care for you," she said—"I care for you; that's enough! If you were to go to prison, I should go with you. If you were to die, dear heart, I should die too."

The girl spoke truth. Who shall account for these sudden overmastering passions, that take possession of humanity to defy all considerations of self-esteem, self-preservation, probability, fit-

ness, and, especially, common sense? A man passes a shape in the street, catches the glance of an eye at a window, the turn of an ear in a playhouse, and straightway, as in the taking of an epidemic, his whole system becomes impregnated with a strange and subtle poison, for which there is no antidote and but one remedy. The disease must run its course. In a few days the fever is at its height, the delirium paramount, liver deranged, appetite impaired, brain seriously affected, and the patient, to all intents and purposes, raving mad. He is haunted by delusions; an inevitable figure is always dancing before his eyes; he forgets his business and friends, his nearest and dearest; neglects his mother, sisters, aunts, cousins, and in some aggravated cases, even his wife. His sleep is broken, his eye wild, his speech incoherent. His fellows shun him like a leper, and he rejoices in this enforced isolation. He meets with no encouragement and little sympathy. Fresh constitutions, as yet unimpaired, and old battered patients who have recovered from the disease, shrug their shoulders and say, "Poor devil! he's in love"; but these observers entertain for him less of pity than contempt. The calamity is accepted as a dispensation, and nobody thinks it worth while to offer a syllable of comfort or advice, because experience has shown that the illness must at last be cured by indulgence or die a lingering death in disappointment.

A woman, too, is liable to the same disorder, contracted even more unreasonably, and with

less apparent cause. Her symptoms, if not so obtrusive or troublesome to others, are none the less dangerous to herself. In some cases, happily but rare, they prove incurable. It is of *men* that the poet says, "They have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love."

Nelly Carew, whose life had hitherto flowed on in a calm unruffled stream, little thought the gentle, scarce perceptible pleasure she experienced in a stranger's society, on the memorable evening when she addressed him for the first time, to thank him for his courtesy while he helped her grandfather home, must soon grow into a hunger of the heart that nothing but absolute reciprocity could appease. The second time she saw him she feared, the third time she admitted, the fourth she gloried in her enslavement. They had known each other barely a week, when Nelly discovered and confessed that henceforth, if life was to be passed apart from John Garnet, she would rather elect to die. He, too, surrendered at discretion, or rather without discretion, so soon as the blue eyes opened fire. Wilfully blind to his ruined prospects and his false position, he abandoned himself to the happiness of the hour, forgetting the past, ignoring the future—Waif, Katerfelto, Lord Bellinger, robbery, high treason, and Tyburn Hill, while he held Nelly Carew's hand, and looked lovingly in her delicate face under the apple-trees by Porlock Bay.

"I need not go to prison, and I need not die," he answered lightly. "This is a secure hiding-

place enough. I should like to stay here for the rest of my life."

"It must be very dull!" observed Nelly, plaiting the hem of her apron. "I wonder how long it would take for you to weary of us all?"

There could be but one answer to such an accusation, and he was ready with it before she could explain.

"Weary!" he repeated, "weary of Porlock! weary of *you*, Nelly, from whom I never mean to part! How can you say such things? You know you did not mean it!" And again Nelly's disclaimer was stifled on her lips.

"Besides," he added gaily, "what can a man want to make him happy more than I have here? The sweetest girl in the world to walk with, and the best horse in England to ride. I gave him a ten-mile stretch on the moor this morning, while you were fast asleep and dreaming. *Were* you dreaming, Nelly?"

"Never mind my dreams," she answered, blushing. "If I did dream of somebody, I'm not going to say so. Tell me about your ride."

"I met a strange old man," he continued, "so weird looking that in the North we should have thought him something uncanny, a Brownie, at least, or a wandering spirit of the moor. Not that he was a jack-o'-lanthorn nor will-o'-the-wisp, for he showed me the way out, instead of luring me into a bog, or I should have been there now."

"You must never try to cross our moors without me," said Nelly gravely, "or somebody who knows them well, to take care of you."

"Will you take care of me?" and "Never mind, that is not the question now," were two necessary interpolations before John Garnet could proceed.

"The man knew his ground, every inch of it," he continued, "and offered to put me in the right way for home. His pony, he said, was hobbled at the head of the coomb, but he seemed to think very little of walking ten miles out of his road, and he looked between seventy and eighty."

"It must have been Red Rube!" exclaimed Nelly joyfully. "Did he say there were deer in Horner Woods? Oh! how I long for a gallop over the moor after a stag, and—with you!"

John Garnet pondered. There would be little risk, he thought, in joining these West-country gentlemen in the hunting-field. Most of them were of his own way of thinking in politics, and for many his ready audacity had preserved, at least temporarily, both life and lands. Even if recognised, it was unlikely he would be denounced; and then, the temptation! To ride Katerfelto far ahead of meaner steeds from ridge to ridge and coomb to coomb, sweeping over mountain and moor as though on the wings of an eagle, to hover at last alone in his glory above the dying deer, while a burst of music from the good hounds pealing louder than its roar, announced in a crash of triumph that here, under the deafening waterfall, they had set him up to bay!

Yes, he would have a ride, he resolved, in pursuit of the red deer, at any risk and at any cost!

"Who talked about dreaming?" she said, "and who is dreaming now? Where have your thoughts flown to all in a minute? They are miles and miles from Porlock. I can see it in your face."

She had already arrived at the stage of jealousy —jealousy that was fain to be mistress of his thoughts, no less than of his words, deeds, looks, and actions. Truly, for Nelly, the pleasantest part of the whole delusion was even now at an end. To be on the brink is delightful, but to fall in love is more than uncomfortable; it is a process akin to pain. The fire looks bright and cheerful enough, but wisdom warms its hands thereat, while folly burns its fingers to the bone.

"I was thinking how comely you must look on the white pony with your hair blown about by the Exmoor breezes," said he; and Nelly seemed so pleased with his answer, that the rest of their conversation was carried on in whispers, too low to be overheard even by the "little bird on the green trée," but of which the purport may be gathered from a final sentence delivered by John Garnet in a louder tone, as of a man who resolves to carry his point in defiance of all obstacles.

"Then I may come up and speak to your grandfather this afternoon?"

She acquiesced with a timid little nod and a bright blush, that she stooped her head to hide, retiring with swift and noiseless steps towards her home.

But whatever passages of folly between these

young people may have escaped notice from the "little bird on the green tree," whose own love-songs must seem to it so much more rational than "what he is saying, what answereth she," there crouched behind the hedge of the orchard one whose dark eye and tawny ear missed not the lowest whisper, the lightest gesture — whose tameless heart quivered and throbbed with every syllable, every caress, as at the stroke of a knife. If women are all jealous, even in the silks and satins and conventional fetters of civilised life, what must be the jealousy of a savage nature unreclaimed by education, untamed by principle, untaught by the selfishness that is so essential a constituent of respectability and good sense? It is possessed by the devil, who tears and rends it, refusing to be cast out.

Waif, or Thyra, as she was called by her own people, had journeyed with them into the West Country nothing loath, for she knew they were following in the track of the man she loved. Restored to her tribe after an absence of many years, her familiarity with the habits of the Gorgios rendered her an exceedingly valuable acquisition. She had the knack of dukkering, or telling fortunes, with a tact that brought in handfuls of silver, and many a balanser in red gold; therefore she came and went unquestioned in the tents; could be absent at all hours, and for as long as she pleased. Nor, so soon as she found herself within reach of John Garnet's retreat, was she slow to take advantage of her liberty.

A dozen miles afoot, across the moorland heather and along the sweet-scented Somersetshire lanes, was an easy journey to Waif's supple frame and light untiring tread. The honest carriers, leading their string of pack-horses, looked after her in open-mouthed admiration, with blessings, homely but sincere, on her strange swarthy beauty, so well set off by the short scarlet cloak and the gold in her raven hair. A housewife possessing the old faith would cross herself perhaps; or her gossip, a Primitive Methodist, would mutter a charm against witchcraft as the dark girl passed; but the country folk generally, though regarding her people with little favour, were not proof against Waif's flashing eyes and flattering tongue, while she returned their "good-morrow" and promised them good luck. One stout farmer, riding a half-broken colt, insisted on stopping to have his fortune told, crossing his broad palm with a silver shilling, and demanding in return a shilling's worth of her craft. "Three groats, uncle," said Waif, looking up in his jolly face with a roguish leer, while the colt fidgeted, and the rider, half pleased, half ashamed, hid his confusion in a "Woa! drat ye, stan' still!" and a sheepish laugh.

"Three is a lucky number, good gentleman.

"'Three silver groats,
Three women's lives,
Three cows, three calves,
Three scolding wives.
The first to lie at your side,
The second to lie at your feet,
The third a widow, a witch, and a bride
To sew your winding-sheet.'"

The man, who had been twice married and was not indisposed for another venture, rode on in no slight perplexity, pondering this mysterious doggerel, and more convinced than ever that the gipsy-folk, as he called them, possessed some dark and dreadful knowledge, unlimited in scope and embracing the future as the past.

With a beating heart, that yet danced in her bosom under a sense of her own happiness, Waif drew near the village of Porlock. She had decided to exercise the utmost caution in approaching John Garnet's refuge, lest her presence should in any way compromise his safety, or afford a clue to his hiding-place. For one of her race, this was no difficult task. Her gipsy experiences had taught her long ago to take advantage of every irregularity of surface, even in so open a plain as Marlborough Downs; and in such a country as West Somerset, with its narrow lanes, high tangled hedges, scattered brakes, impervious copses, valleys, coombs, and forests, rugged mountains and broken moor, Waif could glide from point to point as secretly and almost as swiftly as the very wild deer, to which she bore some vague and fanciful resemblance. Since she told the farmer his fortune, three leagues off, no mortal eye had rested on her form till she caught sight of the man she loved, within three hundred feet.

Why did her colour fade, her breath come quick, her blood run icy cold? There was a white dress by John Garnet's side, and that unaccountable intuition, swift and subtle as the

electric spark—that instinct of the heart, which never hesitates and is never mistaken, told her the truth. This was the meeting for which she had so longed, to compass which she had cajoled Fin Cooper, deceived her people, and travelled afoot across the heather all these weary miles! Waif trembled and her knees shook; for the first time in her life she turned sick and faint.

That cruel pain of hers, though, was not of the kind to gain relief from insensibility. On the contrary, all her faculties seemed preternaturally sharpened, while she writhed her slim body like a snake through tufted grass and broad dock-leaves, and all the luxuriant vegetation of the adjoining meadow, to a hedge that fenced the orchard, where, parting the tangled branches in her noiseless hands, she peered through, with the eager, hopeless gaze of an outcast spirit looking on the paradise it has lost. Not a smile, not a glance, not an unwise gesture of that fond, foolish pair escaped the watcher. When John Garnet stooped to kiss Nelly's brow, it seemed as if molten lead had dropped on her own and seared it to the brain. Then it was that the white teeth clenched to keep back a little piteous cry, and the nimble fingers stole to her knife, as though she must needs bury it in his breast, whom she loved, or hers, the rival's, whom she hated, or, better still, deep and quivering to the very haft in her own!

But strong as is the passion of jealousy, it is not, especially in the female breast, without an element of curiosity that is stronger still.

To scream, to stab, to make any overt disturb-

ance, would be to declare her presence and debar her from hearing more. Waif bit her lip till the blood came, and nerved herself to listen. Thus, as the lovers paced to and fro, taking short turns after the manner of their kind, and stopping altogether in often-repeated pauses for the interchange of superfluous endearments, she made herself mistress of their secret and overheard all their conversation. She learned, not without a bitter pang, how short was John Garnet's sojourn in this fatal vicinity, where she had been so soon and so easily forgotten. She learned the penalty that would be exacted for his late exploit, in which she had herself taken part, should his identity with the reputed highwayman be discovered by those who were already on his track. She learned in a brief period of eavesdropping, that seemed an eternity of misery, more of his daring courage and good-humoured recklessness —of those very qualities she most admired and loved in him—than she ever knew before. And, lastly, she learned that the whole scaffolding on which she so unconsciously built the edifice of her future had crumbled into ruins and crushed her own heart in its collapse.

Waif had no God to whom she could pray in this agony of sorrow; but looking round in wild appeal to sea and sky and mountain, as though they were sentient beings, her large dark eyes seemed to plead with Nature, the only mother she knew, and to demand, in mute upbraiding, why her punishment was greater than she could bear.

CHAPTER XVIII

DUKE MICHAEL OF EGYPT

A THOROUGH gipsy bred and born, Waif so far resembled a wild animal of the woods that, when sore stricken, she instinctively sought her home. Scarce knowing how, she sped back to the encampment of her people, swift and straight as the red hind that neither fails nor falters though she carries a bullet in her breast. It was not because she expected to find comfort there, nor relief, nor even a moment's respite from pain, but she felt constrained to keep moving, always moving, at the utmost speed she could command, though as she flitted lightly from moor to moor it seemed to her benumbed and dizzy brain that she herself stood still, while the acres of heather she traversed passed like running water beneath her feet.

Yet the sun was already down when she turned the head of a deep and lonely coomb, which her tribe had chosen for their resting-place, and caught sight of the little points of fire that dotted its heathery ridge, toned down to dusky purple under the crimson flushes of the evening sky. Kettles were already simmering before the brown,

weather-worn tents, and that happy hour of food and rest had arrived which seems to recompense the gipsy for all the hardships of his wandering lot, to make amends for toil and risk, rough usage and coarse fare, the frown of justice, the ban of society, an outlaw's life, and, too often, a felon's grave.

To-night, however, more than its usual tendency to revelry and rejoicing seemed to pervade the camp. In the first place, this particular tribe were honoured by the presence of their chief, a crafty old gentleman who chose to call himself Duke Michael of Egypt, doubtless in memory of that celebrated vagabond who, early in the fifteenth century, led his ragged troup through Saxony and Switzerland, leaving behind him, if we may believe the old chroniclers, a better character than might have been expected for good behaviour and honesty — nay, paying in hard money for such articles as he required from the peasantry in the countries through which he passed ; an example, it is hardly necessary to observe, scrupulously avoided by the Duke Michael with whom we have to do. This worthy made it a rule, no doubt, to deny himself nothing he wanted that might be had for the taking ; and few matters, he often boasted, were too hot or too heavy for his conveyance, but he could not have been induced to give anything in exchange.

It was as natural for his Grace to steal as to shape a tent-peg, mend a kettle, or tell a lie. Yet in bearing and costume he varied probably but little from his predecessor of the Middle

Ages, as that nobleman's likeness has been handed down in the rude woodcuts of the period. There was the battered hat with a coarse and dirty kerchief rolled round its brim; the pair of patched, ill-mended shoes, slashed at the toes and slippered at the heel; of leggings worn and stained with mud from every soil; the gaudy blanket, rent and frayed, to hide the greasy coat and fouler skin beneath; with many another token of dirt, vermin, and dishonesty to pervade the man from head to foot, and proclaim him an outcast from his kind. The lapse of more than three centuries had done but little to civilise or improve a Duke Michael of Egypt.

Yet the battered hat perched on those abundant locks, now white as snow, once black as the raven's wing, covered a brain that might have served a statesman for its keen perception, cool audacity, quiet cunning—above all, for its administrative powers. That is no mean intellect which can reign with dignity and rule with force, though the palace be but a dingy tent, the subjects a gipsy tribe. Duke Michael possessed the secret of government; and to-night, being more drunk than usual, was better than ever assured of his authority and the loyalty of his people. So loud were the bursts of hilarity in and about the great man's tent, that Waif paused to listen on a ridge of moor overlooking the camp, and forgot in her surprise, for perhaps the space of a second, the pain gnawing at her heart. It was recalled ere she could be conscious of relief.

Fin Cooper's tall form, growing on her, as it were, in the twilight, was already at her side, his voice whispering in her ear—"I've watched for you, Thyra," said he, "since long before noon. The camp seems lonely and empty when you leave it for a day; and I often wonder now how we could do without you so many years! But what has been our sister's good luck? Has she returned with pockets full of gold? Has she deceived and fleeced the Gorgio, and stolen the very heart out of his breast?"

Waif smiled a bitter smile. "The Gorgio turns the tables sometimes, Fin," she answered. "When you deal out the cards to play, how can you tell who is to rise up winner?"

He looked sharply in her face. "You're tired," said he; "you that never used to be tired, no more than the wild deer in the forest, the wild bird in the air. Thyra! Thyra!" he added, and his voice came low and husky, as if an enemy's hand gripped his throat, "there's something dark come between you and me! Something that dims the light in your eye, and takes the colour out of your face. What is it? Speak, girl, and tell the truth. There's times when I could put my knife into you, and make an end of it once for all. I'll do it some day, I know; I feel like it now!"

In her exceeding misery, but for the last sentence she might have told him her secret then and there; but to threaten Waif was to throw stones into the air that would fall back

perpendicularly on a man's head. The gipsy-girl recovered her strength and courage in the drawing of a breath. "That's a game for two players!" she answered fiercely. "I've worn a knife too, Fin, as long as I can remember, and I keep it sharper than yours, I daresay. But what's the use of you and me wrangling? I'm not bound to tell *you* where I've been—when I go out—and when I come in. You're not my master, brother; not *yet*!"

She was sufficiently a woman to put just such an emphasis on the last word as changed his mood like magic. In a moment he was her slave again, ready to do her bidding, obey her lightest wish, no less eagerly than when he went bird-nesting for her in his boyhood, long years ago.

"But you'll tell me some day," he pleaded, bending his tall form to look in the girl's face. "You'll keep nothing from Fin when we hang the kettle at our own tent-door in the camp of the Vardo-mescros, and my brothers troop in by scores to have a look at Fin Cooper's beautiful wife; you'll tell me all your secrets then, Thyra, won't you?"

"Perhaps!" answered Waif. "In the meantime, will you tell me what makes this stir and noise amongst our people? They are swarming down yonder like bees about a hive."

"Duke Michael came in at noon," answered Fin, "and the kettles have been singing in the smoke ever since. He brought the cart and the donkey and both his wives from the cudgel-

players' country" (Cornwall), "and never halted but once to do a bit of tinkering on a moorland farm till he turned the head of the coomb here in our very midst. The women were so tired that Lura would have fallen flat to the ground if I hadn't caught her in my arms and lifted her out of the cart. Old Maggie was little better, though she boasts that the Bosvilles of the Border want neither food nor rest if they can get enough to drink; but the duke tossed off a *coro* of brandy, pitched his tent, lit his fire, swung his kettle, and went into business at once, as if he were thirty years old instead of getting on for ninety! There's been eating and drinking in plenty ever since. Not a Romany will lie down sober to-night, Thyra, but me, and I've you to thank for it!" He spoke in the plaintive tone of one who had sustained injury from a beloved hand, but relents and forgives.

A fresh burst of laughter, with the chorus of a song led by stentorian lungs, reached them where they stood. On Waif's strung nerves and weary frame it jarred acutely; but Fin turned his head to listen with obvious approval. "That's the Gorgio!" he exclaimed; "the mellowest voice and the best man of his weight this side Barnstaple, be the other who he may! If we'd known more about him, we'd never played him such a trick to bring him here!"

"What Gorgio?" asked the girl, for whom there was but one in the world, her foolish heart beating fast with a wild hope that in

some impossible manner John Garnet might even now be a visitor to the gipsies' camp.

"Why, the Parson, as they call him," answered Fin; "the jolly Exmoor parson, who can tail an otter, harbour a stag, ride a colt, sing a song, wrestle a fall, ay, and empty a pitcher, with the cleverest Romany lad of us all. I wouldn't undertake him myself, Thyra, single-handed, not if he was sober. We laid a trap for him, howsoever, and into it he fell; so, here he is! Thyra, what makes you tremble? Do *you* know anything of this roystering parson? I've heard strange stories of his doings on the country-side. Girl! you'll make me kill you now before you've done!" His jealousy needed but a breath to fan it into flame, yet was to be appeased no less quickly than aroused.

"You're a fool, Fin!" she said with a laugh, which, though forced, seemed reassuring to her lover. "It's neither you nor this parson of yours that would make *me* tremble. Keep your hands off and behave yourself, or I'll go home this minute! I know the man you speak of, but I never heard any good of him. How did our people bring him into the camp, and why?"

Fin's brow cleared, while he answered her question with a laugh. "The Parson," he explained, "rears the best breed of fighting-cocks in the West of England. There was one in his pen this morning, good enough to take the crow out of the gamest *chiriclo* that ever wore spurs. He's safe in my tent now, with his head in a stocking to keep him quiet. This day week,

at Devizes, he'll be worth ten, ay, twenty guineas in red gold. But the money would never have come my way, if little Ryley and me hadn't 'ticed the Parson here!"

"How so?" asked Waif listlessly, for her thoughts were travelling far away.

"When he means winning," said Fin, "he trains the birds himself; and it's a job, as I've been told, to get him away from them for an hour. It would take a better Romany than me, Thyra, or little Ryley either, to *chore* so much as a clout off a clothes-line, if the Parson was within a mile of the place. So how do you think we worked it? Why, we got up a wrestling-match on the cross, you know, between Humpy Hearne and black James Lee, in honour of our old man's visit, and we 'ticed the Parson into the camp to see fair. He knows the rules of the ring, and keeps them all in his head as plain as print. He's the sort that would sooner ride fifty miles to a fight than five to a prayer-meeting. So he up and puts the saddle on, and down the coomb he swings at a gallop, as if he'd a spare neck in each pocket, and leaps off before old Michael, with his shovel-hat in his hand. 'It's not every day,' says he, 'in our West Country that a parson comes to visit a duke. Let's have a drink,' says he, 'deep enough to do credit to both!' and with that he empties a half-pint horn of brandy, and throws it over his left shoulder for luck. There was a cheer you might have heard at Taunton. Our old duke wasn't to be bragged at such a game as that. He answered fair and honest, gill for gill; so down

they sat on a blanket by the tent-door, and they've been at it ever since. In the meantime, little Ryley he slips round over the moor and brings the *chiriclo* back with him, coop and all. It's a beautiful bird, Thyra. I'll show it you to-morrow as soon as it's light; but if I'd known the Parson could sing so good a song, he should never have lost a feather out of its wing for Ryley and me!"

Waif seemed thoughtful and preoccupied. Presently she looked up and said quietly, "I must go and show myself to our old duke, Fin, before he's too far gone to see me. Will you come down to the tents? and, Fin, don't you speak unkindly, that's a good lad, and don't you take much notice of what I say and do. I've had a long walk in the hot harvest sun, and I'm not quite myself to-day, that's the truth!"

So she put her hand in his, and threading some half-score of tents, every one of which was deserted for the great attraction of the duke's presence, soon reached an open space, where some thirty or forty gipsies, men, women, and children, crouched round a scanty fire, laughing, drinking, smoking, and all talking at once.

It was a wild scene. Every now and then a gipsy would throw on another faggot, and the pale flickering streaks of flame brought into shifting, shadowy relief the grotesque figures of which the circle was composed. In the background stood a common tinker's cart, though it seemed wonderful that anything on wheels could have arrived in safety at this remote and solitary nook, sur-

rounded by leagues of moor; while the donkey that drew it calmly browsed and meditated in the enjoyment of well-earned repose. Propping his back against the shaft, and raised some inches from the ground by his own and his wives' blankets doubled beneath him, Duke Michael of Egypt sat in state, with a short black pipe in his hand and a pewter measure containing gin and cider at his knee. Even Waif, accustomed as she was to many a strange sight amongst her strange people, marvelled as she gazed.

His dress, though ragged and filthy in the extreme, was made of costly materials and the brightest colours, his coat being of fine blue cloth dotted by spade-guineas instead of buttons; his waistcoat, faded scarlet, bound with tawdry gold-lace; the very link that fastened his stained flannel shirt at the throat was a gold seven-shilling piece! It was thus that he loved to display the riches of which he was as proud as if they were the fruits of an honest calling. At one extremity of this magnificence, stockingless feet peeped through a pair of rent and clouted shoes; while at the other, a woollen night-cap under a battered hat crowned the snow-white poll that contrasted ludicrously with his swarthy face, tanned nearly black, and seamed with so many wrinkles that it looked more like morocco leather than a human skin.

Yet, even now, the dark eyes beneath their shaggy brows sparkled with intelligence and fire; the deep voice, in which he passed his jest or trolled his chorus, spoke of health and strength

and vital energies unimpaired by age. He had removed the pipe from his mouth, and was pledging Parson Gale for the twentieth time, when Waif stepped into the firelight, bowed her head in a graceful obeisance, and stood silent before him with her arms crossed on her breast.

The old man stared at this beautiful apparition for some seconds without a word, obviously congratulating himself, the tribe, and the Romany people in general, on the possession of so favourable a specimen of their race. Presently he chuckled, took a pull at his flagon, and spoke out—

"Ay, ay," said he, "it's you, is it, my pretty lass? No need to tell me who you are, my *rinkeny tawny*, my delicate brown beauty! There's not such another face as that in the tribe, nor there hasn't been since Lura there tripped over the Border out of Cumberland to be an old man's wife, who had one too many already. And that's a score of years ago, and more. Parson Gale! Parson Gale, I say, can your Reverence show us such a pair of eyes in North Devon? I dare you to do it; or such a walk, such a shape, such a foot and ankle as that. We have but one Thyra in the tribe, Parson, and there she stands. Don't be shame-faced, man! look at her well."

But for an impatient tap of the little foot, Waif might have been a statue, so immovably did she retain a posture of humility that the etiquette of Duke Michael's court prescribed on a first presentation. Even among the gipsies there rose

a murmur of admiration, called forth by her unusual beauty and assured bearing, suggestive of modesty and self-respect. The Parson, a veteran toper, was still sober enough, notwithstanding his potations, to recognise the girl he had seen and insulted at Katerfelto's door. He was also wise enough to reflect that here, amongst her friends and kinsmen, any allusion to that meeting would be injudicious and unsafe. The gipsies were ready with their knives, their blood was heated with drinking, the coomb was lonely and secluded; his horse stood tethered two hundred yards off, and he was a long way from home. He glanced respectfully, almost imploringly, in Waif's face, while he replied with a discretion for which he deserved some credit—

"There's many a likely lass in North Devon, my lord duke, though I won't say they come up to the beauty and wisdom of the Egyptians, but I'm no great judge of such matters myself. They don't belong to my cloth and my calling. I know a good dog when I see him, or a game-cock; I can tell the points of a pacing nag, or the slot of a warrantable deer; but when you talk of black eyes and blue, chestnut hair and brown, I am at fault—that's where *I* am. No, no; I'm a far better judge of your strong ale."

"Well said, Parson!" exclaimed the duke; "you're one of my sort, I see; and a right good fellow, too. Ah! if your Reverence and I could make the world again, wouldn't we put fewer women in it and more drink? Go your ways, my lass," he added, nodding to Waif; "you're

black enough, and comely enough, to turn an older head than mine, and I guess I'm not very far from a hundred. My service to you, Parson; we'll trouble no more about the petticoats. The night is young, and that cask not half empty yet."

But Waif, while she retired, bestowed on Abner Gale a glance of such deep meaning as to puzzle him exceedingly. While he passed the cup and the jest with his entertainers, discussed the past wrestling bout, of which he was good enough to express approval, and even condescended to sing a song in praise of that manly exercise, his thoughts persistently reverted to the tawny delicate face with its mournful beauty, the large dark eyes that looked into his own so sad and wistful, yet with fierce impatient longing, like those of some wild animal from whom men have taken away its young.

CHAPTER XIX

TEMPTED SORE

THERE were few better horses in the West of England than Parson Gale's black nag Cassock, a beast on which he had performed many surprising feats of speed and endurance for trifling wagers amongst his friends. It speaks well for the favourable impression made by their clerical guest on his entertainers that the gipsies allowed him to retain possession of so valuable a steed, when nothing would have been easier than to slip its halter and convey it secretly out of the camp while its master was engaged in his debauch. These strange people, however, respected their own peculiar principles of justice and fair-dealing, even in a life of robbery and fraud. Holding somewhat stringent notions on the laws of hospitality, they were, moreover, much fascinated by the Parson's freedom of manners and great absorbent powers. Cassock, therefore, was liberally supplied with the best forage they had

to give; and when at last, in spite of the duke's protestations and the entreaties of his court, Abner Gale declared his intention of departing at once to travel home by moonlight, a score of tawny hands were ready to adjust saddle and bridle, to hold the stirrup while he mounted, and to wave a good-speed after him as he rode away.

Only Fin Cooper, a born horse-dealer and horse-stealer, regretted the scruples of his tribe. "What was the use of plying the Gorgio with ale and brandy," he murmured, as he lay down to sleep in his tattered blanket, "if he is to leave the Romanies no poorer than he came to these tents? I could have *chored* that *gry*, that good black nag, ay, stolen it twenty times over, while they emptied their cask by the fire, and sold it back again, as likely as not, to the Parson himself fresh and sober at Barnstaple Fair before harvest was done. And now I should like to know how any one of us is the better for this visit? though he sings a good song, I'll not deny, and takes his drink as free as old Michael himself." Then, hearing the game-cock he had stolen stirring in its coop, Fin thought better of his grievances and dropped asleep, soothed by the reflection that the hospitality of his people had not been without some return, nor his own ingenuity wholly thrown away.

In the meantime Parson Gale, sitting rather loose in the saddle, was rounding the head of the coomb in which he had been so hospitably treated, with a wandering eye, flushed cheek, and brain dizzy from the strength of his potations.

A harvest moon, high in heaven, flooded the moor with light, so that the good horse picked his way through the heather, avoiding the level patches of bog as easily as at noonday. Cassock had learned from a foal to mind his own footsteps, to look out for himself in the scanty pastures he shared with the mountain sheep or wild red deer on the hills where he was bred, and could skim the rush-grown swamps around the Black Pits of Exmoor, safe and swift as the very bittern that flitted across those lonely haunts. Going freely from his shoulders, but collected and prepared for effort behind the saddle, with head low, ears pointed, and the froth flying lightly from his bit, as he swayed at every stride to the turn of his rider's hand, he could sweep along at a gallop over ground where an unaccustomed horse would have stuck fast up to its girths before it had gone fifty yards. That sense, too, which we call instinct in the brute, because of its superiority to the power we call reason in the man, forbade him to venture on any surface wholly incapable of affording foothold; and it would have required all the persuasions of consummate horsemanship from his rider to beguile Cassock into a real, unmitigated, fathomless Devonshire bog. The horse was bred on the moor, and on the moor had never yet met his match. To-night he seemed more careful than usual, edging from side to side under his burden, as though conscious that on him, the drinker of water, must devolve the duty of balancing his master, the drinker of ale! He knew his way home, too, and could

have found it like a dog; nor would he have objected to increase the pace considerably, had he received the slightest indication that his lord was inclined for a gallop.

The Parson, however, had fallen into a meditative mood; such a mood as might possess a rough imaginative nature amongst the fairest scenes in England on a mellow autumn night. He paced along the sheep-track Cassock had selected at a walk, now stroking his horse's neck with maudlin kindness, now looking about him over the moonlit heather in affable approval; anon sighing deeply, and raising his eyes to heaven with a meaningless smile.

Yet was his brain busy too, busy with stirring memories, morbid fancies, wild speculations—all the grotesque ideas that crowd into a man's mind when imagination is stimulated and judgment warped by the influence of strong drink. He seemed lifted, as it were, out of himself, and incorporated with that external nature of which he was perhaps a more faithful worshipper than he knew. He felt as if he could ride the moonbeam with the fairies, join in its moan with the spirit of the waterfall, shout aloud with the spirit of the air, or chase over its mountain ridges the spirit of the moor. Speaking words of encouragement to Cassock, he started at the sound of his own voice. The brushing of his horse's legs, knee-deep in heather, made his blood run cold, for it seemed to him that some phantom rider was at his heels. What if the devil in person, on a coal-black steed, were to come alongside and

accost him, daring him to some break-neck gallop over rocks and precipices, that his own dead body and his horse's might be found, crushed and mangled in their fall, when the sun rose? He had heard of such things, and said to himself he would scorn to refuse the challenge, and would defy the devil then and there, less in the confidence of a good conscience than in the evil courage of despair. He wished, though, that he had filled his flask down yonder before he left the gipsy tents. A nip of brandy would do him a world of good just now, and keep out the night air. Then, with the inconsistency of his condition, he threw open his waistcoat and loosened the kerchief round his throat.

Presently the man within the man, the working partner in the firm, who never sleeps, never gets drunk, never loses his consciousness nor his identity, even when contusions or alcohol have numbed to insensibility his associate's weaker brain,—the man who reproves us when we are wicked, who laughs at us when we are fools; to whom we make apologies for weakness and excuses for crime,—began to separate himself, as it were, from the corporeal Parson Gale, and take him to task with half-indulgent cynicism for the shortcomings of which both inner and outer man were fully conscious. Said the one to the other, "See now, I knew how it would be! You are at your old tricks again, Abner Gale, though you promised me yourself, only last week after Mounsey Revel, it should be the last time till Martinmas! You're not ashamed of it—not a

bit! You're a good fellow, you say, and cannot refuse a cup when it's offered in good-fellowship. All very well, my friend, but *respice finem!* There's Latin for you. Ah! you knew a bit of Latin once; I don't think it ever did you much good; but *keep your eye forward!* You can do that still when you ride to hounds across the moor. Look to the result. Already your hand has begun to shake; you can scarce button the knees of your breeches till you've had your morning draught, and you couldn't tie a fly to save your life. Already you know what it is to hear a buzzing in your ears, and feel a shooting pain in your joints. The last time you wrestled a fall with little Tremaine, he threw you easily with a cross-buttock, and he is but a ten-stone man. It won't do, Abner Gale—it can't go on! You'll be losing your nerve next, and what is to become of you then? Cassock, my boy, you'll hardly know your master when he's afraid to ride! but it hasn't come to that yet. Take a pull, my lad, before it's too late. You've seen many a man as sober as a judge who is as happy as a king! It wouldn't be such a bad life, after all, to shoot and hunt and fish where you know every hazel in the copse, every tuft on the heather, every pebble in the stream; to look after your parish, speak a kind word to your poor, and come back at night, hungry and happy, to meet a loving welcome in your own home. Pull yourself together, Abner Gale; for all your reddened face and grizzled hair, there's many an older man than you goes wooing still. What more should a girl

want than bone and muscle, a good heart and an easy temper,—your temper is easy enough when you're not put out,—a joint at the kitchen fire, and a slate roof over her head? So why should the likeliest lass in all the West Country say nay? Abner Gale! Abner Gale! there was one chance left, and maybe you lost it to-day, getting drunk with a parcel of tinkers and gipsies on the open moor."

Then the outer man reined in his horse, and while Cassock cropped the luxuriant heather under his nose, looked long and wistfully over a waste of uplands to where the moonlight broke in glints of gold upon the Severn Sea. Below him yonder lay the sweep of Porlock Bay, and not a stone's-throw from its edge, lulled by the lap and ripple of the tide, slept the only woman on earth he wished to call his wife.

But was it too late? Each by each, he recapitulated, with a certain grim humour (for the night air had not yet thoroughly sobered him), the advances he had hazarded, all the rebuffs he had received. Were these not sufficiently explicit? Were these but the resources of maidenly reserve and shame?—Or was there somebody she liked better?

Bright and clear as the colouring of a picture came back the scene he had witnessed when he found the stranger sitting on the rocks by her side. She had been more silent than common, he remembered, after the new visitor took his leave; but he never thought her so beautiful, never noted so deep a lustre in her eye, so rich a

colour in her cheek. Was it possible? Such things had happened before. Could it be that she already loved this come-by-chance, and that he, Parson Gale, must be worsted in the one object of his life; must run second in the race he would barter his very soul to win?

And now, had the devil been, indeed, following on his track, had he ridden alongside, stirrup to stirrup, and offered him his fiendish assistance, the evil spirit could not have more fully possessed the man than while he ground a savage curse between his teeth, on himself, his horse, his fellows, the brute creation, all nature, animate and inanimate, to think that he should have lost Nelly Carew, the girl he had coveted from her childhood, to an unknown stranger, the acquaintance of a day. Somebody must pay for it. There should be no mistake about that! Perhaps it was less Nelly's fault than her new friend's, this young springald, who came into the West, forsooth, with his town-bred manners and his town-made clothes, to rob honest men of their own. But town or country, the best of them should not poach on Parson Gale's moor without hearing of it. He only wished he could find out something more about him, that was all. If the devil himself offered to back him up now, he would drive no hard bargain, but pay fair market price for his help!

Cassock started violently, with a loud and prolonged snort. A more sober rider might have been both alarmed and unseated, so suddenly did the animal swerve aside from a

dusky figure that rose against the sky out of its very path; but a good horseman's balance seems little influenced by unsteadiness of brain, and the Parson felt a thrill of triumph rather than fear, in the wild fancy that his awful wish had been granted, and the powers of evil had consented to afford him the assistance he required.

"Speak up!" he exclaimed in a fierce and threatening voice, the more angrily, perhaps, that he felt his flesh creep with superstitious dread. "If you come straight from hell, I'll have a word with you before you go back. Steady, Cassock, my lad. What, you know her, do ye? and it's only the little gipsy-lass, after all!"

The figure, dim and phantom-like as it stood there beneath the moon, threw back its scarlet hood, and revealed to the Parson's excited senses no spirit from below, but Waif's tangible beauty, pale indeed, and careworn, yet strangely attractive still, with its wild, sad eyes, and wealth of raven hair.

She laid her hand on Cassock's neck, and the horse tolerated her caress, though his restless backward-moving ear showed he was only half reassured.

"I know you!" said Waif. "I've seen you before. I watched you from our tents, and waited here to make sure. Parson Gale, I can tell you something you would give ten years of your life to know."

She had waylaid him purposely at the bend of the coomb that he could not pass to reach the level moor, arriving by a path only accessible to

an active hill-climber on foot, so that even had he come round at a gallop she must have been here before him.

"Can you tell me my fortune, pretty lass?" returned Gale, with a forced attempt at gallantry. "Give me hold of that slender little hand, and I'll put a silver groat in it, if I have one left in the world."

He leaned over his horse's shoulder while he spoke, preserving his balance with some difficulty. Waif, keeping well out of reach, gave no encouragement to his assumed familiarity.

"Forget," she said, "for the time, that I am a gipsy and that you are a priest. Parson Gale, I know the wish that is nearest your heart this very moment. You look for health, ease, happiness, and a good name like your neighbours, but you would give the soul out of your body for revenge!"

He started; the certainty with which she had fathomed his desire, and named its price, recalled the speculations of a few minutes back. Again some nameless fear of the supernatural crept over him, and he shuddered to think that for the compassing of his own eternal destruction the gipsy-girl's shape and semblance might have been assumed by the Prince of Darkness, who thus accosted him face to face. He had seen a Romish priest cross himself under a similar terror. He would have liked now to make the holy sign, and wondered would it be any use?

Waif, if she understood, only despised his hesitation. "I can give you what you want," she said, "and I ask nothing of you in return."

Though spoken in a low voice, almost a whisper, every syllable passed through her firm set lips, hard, cruel, and distinct.

With returning confidence rose the coarse, overbearing manner that had already lost this man so many friends. "Nothing for nothing," said he with a brutal laugh. "Come, lass, exchange is no robbery; speak what you have to say, and take a kiss from an honest fellow in return."

Her delicate face expressed a loathing that the vainest of men must have observed; but Waif had a task to perform, and she went through with it systematically to the bitter end.

"The man you seek," she said, "is in your reach. The man who slew your brother sleeps to-night within three leagues of you, in the hamlet by Porlock Bay. When you stand face to face with John Garnet, tell him that the gipsy-girl he betrayed delivered him into your hand."

The words were hardly spoken before she disappeared behind the abrupt ridge of moor that overhung the coomb, with a rapidity that seemed, indeed, like the vanishing of a ghost. Ere the Parson could realise the startling fact that this stranger, whom he already hated with an instinctive hatred, was the man he had sought in vain for weeks, swearing to hunt him down to death in atonement for a brother's blood—she was gone; and he rubbed his eyes in sheer amazement, almost doubting, even now, whether this had been a vision of fancy or a creature of real flesh and blood.

"The man you seek," she said, "is in your reach."

None the less did he resolve to take advantage of her communication, and riding homeward across the moor, completely sobered by this mysterious interview, determined to lose no time in setting about the destruction of his enemy.

But Waif, traversing aimlessly up and down, wandered through the woods till the moon set, regardless of cold, discomfort, or fatigue, callous even to the weight of misery that benumbed her brain, causing her to move unconsciously here and there, with smooth mechanical gait, like one who walks abroad having mind and senses fettered in the thraldom of a dream.

CHAPTER XX

THE COLD SHOULDER

LADY BELLINGER at least was pleased. When her lord, reflecting that the robbery he had sustained would render abortive his journey to the West, ordered the horses' heads to be turned for London, his wife accepted this alteration in their plans with a fervour of gratitude that sufficiently indicated her dread of a prolonged *tête-à-tête* with her husband. Nor was his lordship unwilling to resume the dissipations of the town, though entertaining shrewd misgivings as to the reception he was likely to meet with from the Sovereign and his ministers. In war, in politics, or in love—in public affairs, as in private, there is no excuse for failure. Success does not necessarily imply merit; but merit, in the eyes of mankind, is a less valuable quality than success. There have been shrewd and prosperous managers of the world's most important matters, who have gone so far as to lay down this practical rule: "Never employ an unlucky man!"

Lady Bellinger was not obliged to have recourse to her drops more than half a dozen times between Hounslow and London on the

return journey. She contradicted my lord hardly twice as often, and was good enough to express a qualified approval of the scenery, the weather, even the roads, which last were execrable. Mistress Rachel, too, seemed pleased to think she was on her way back to civilised life, fresh from an adventure that made her a heroine in her own eyes. The champion with the blunderbuss was already reinstated in her favour; the other servants, by dint of frequent excuses for their poltroonery, and by talking the matter over till they had multiplied a hundred-fold the number and weapons of their assailants, were persuaded they had shown a fair amount of courage; and the whole party, with the exception of its chief, drove back in the highest spirits through the leafy glades of Kensington, to their town residence in Leicester Square. But Lord Bellinger's heart sank as he approached his home. Even for a man of pleasure there is something exceedingly fascinating in a political career, and here had he failed the very first time he was put to trial! It is hard to fall and break one's neck from the very lowest round of the ladder! Had he managed his business discreetly and well, no doubt his name would have been entered on that mysterious roll which Prime Ministers are supposed to keep for the advancement of their friends and supporters, apportioning rewards for service as an animal's food is regulated by its work. To support in many divisions, a baronetcy; to expenditure in a few elections, a peerage; for one timely change of opinion, an earldom; and so on. But it

seemed to Lord Bellinger that he had played his stake in the great game—and lost!

No sooner did he arrive at home than, sending for a modish barber to powder and arrange his hair, he dressed with exceeding splendour—a ceremony his lordship never neglected, and to which he owed much of his social success,—assumed cane, sword, and snuff-box, called a chair, and caused himself to be carried straightway to the Cocoa Tree Club and Coffee-house. It was early in the afternoon, and several gentlemen were absent at their country-seats, yet this resort of loungers and idlers seemed sufficiently full. With the self-consciousness of human nature, an instinct that years of worldly training cannot wholly eradicate, Lord Bellinger believed that his recent failure had made him a marked man; and observing a knot of members congregated in the room, one of whom held the scanty sheet of the *North Briton* in his hand, felt persuaded they must be engaged in discussing his politics, his shortcomings, his insufficiency as a lord-lieutenant, and even his character as a gentleman. There was something of disappointment, mingled with a sense of relief, to observe that his arrival caused no break in their conversation, created no more sensation than if one of the waiters had entered and withdrawn. It is unpleasant, no doubt, to occupy public attention only to be abused; but it is more unpleasant still to be ignored entirely, and to find that when we thought the world was talking about us, our name has never been mentioned at all.

"I'll be judged by Bellinger!" exclaimed the gentleman who held the paper, looking at the new-comer over the others' heads. "Bellinger knows; Bellinger shall decide; Bellinger never leaves town even for a day. Five guineas, Bellinger gives it in my favour!"

"Done!" said a little man in a plum-coloured suit, with enormous ruffles at his wrists, offering his snuff-box to the referee, who looked from one to the other in vague surprise.

"The fact is this," said the little man; "our friend Sir Alexander, there, has been reading an account in the *North Briton* of a fellow who lives somewhere near Covent Garden, and keeps a kind of prophecy shop, where half the ladies in town go to learn each other's secrets and tell their own. The newspaper affirms that he has been driving this trade for years; and though all the while the prophet, or whatever he calls himself, is a spy from over the water, that our ministry never found it out! Sir Alexander vows it's impossible, and appeals to you, my lord, as knowing more of the town and its wicked ways than any man in this room. What say you, Bellinger? I have only five guineas on it; but if I had five hundred I would abide by your award!"

Lord Bellinger's presence of mind rarely deserted him; and although with the topic thus broached, the possibility of Katerfelto's treachery flashed across his brain, he answered quietly, "You do me too much honour, my lord; I cannot give an opinion. I have been in the country more than a week."

"The country!" repeated half a dozen voices in tones of surprise and incredulity. "Bellinger in the country! What, in the name of all that is innocent, should take you to the country? You who have never slept a night out of town since you came of age! Think of the risks! You might have caught milk-fever or chicken-pox! We must believe it, my lord, because your lordship says so."

"It only shows how little a fellow is missed!" replied Lord Bellinger, not too well pleased to find his absence had been unnoticed by those among whom he considered himself a man of mark. "Did you never hear of my coach being robbed; money and papers carried off; myself, my lady, and my servants made prisoners on *parole* by a band of gipsies and a highwayman riding a grey horse? On my honour, gentlemen, I believe not one of you cares a brass farthing for any earthly thing that takes place beyond ten miles from London or two from Newmarket!"

He spoke bitterly, and with an energy so unlike his usual careless manner, that the man in the plum-coloured coat gazed at him in undisguised astonishment.

"A grey horse!" repeated this nobleman, tapping his snuff-box. "The best-actioned horse I ever saw in my life was a grey, and belonged to a highwayman—a fellow they called Galloping Jack. It must have been the very man!"

"Two to one against him!" interrupted a bystander. "Ten guineas to five, my lord, that no gentleman of the road would show such bad

taste as to rob Bellinger, or such deplorable ignorance as to suppose his purse was worth taking."

"I'll go you halves," said a tall youth. "I remember the grey horse, and the man in the mask who rode him; what became of the horse I never heard, but the man was hanged at Tyburn last November!"

In the confusion of tongues created by this statement, offering, as it did, a wide field for speculation, and originating many wagers on the personal identity of the robber in the mask, Bellinger felt an arm thrust under his own to withdraw him from the noisy circle into the recess of a bay-window fronting a street, while a friendly voice whispered in his ear, "Welcome back, my lord. I knew you had left the town, if no one else did. I wish from my soul these gipsies and robbers, and other scoundrels, had turned you back before you reached Kensington!"

It was Harry St. Leger who spoke, his comrade and associate in many a scene of pleasure and dissipation little removed from vice, yet a staunch friend nevertheless—not to be detached by misfortune nor daunted by disgrace. Such cases are less rare than those who hold by the laws of ethics might suppose. The growth of the bog-myrtle is fresh and fair, its fibres are tough and clinging, though it takes root in the blackest and miriest of swamps. Harry St. Leger would have offered him his last guinea ungrudgingly, and with no less flippant a jest, than he would have shed his last drop of blood in a duel to share his

friend's quarrel, as principal or second, or anything he pleased.

"Why so, Harry?" asked Lord Bellinger. "Have you seen the minister? What have you heard?"

"They're in a devil of a stew down there," answered the other, intimating with a jerk of his head the locality in which His Majesty's Council conducted their deliberations. "They've had an enemy in the camp, it seems, ever since the late king's death. Our Gracious himself has been sitting on a powder barrel, only he does not believe it; and would care very little if he did. They've plenty of courage, *that* family, I must admit; we can't say as much for the others. Well, the Scotchman is in a fearful state! The only thief-taker in the town who knows a thief when he sees one, or how to take him, or can be persuaded to try, was with the minister more than two hours yesterday. The other side will put up somebody to ask a question directly Parliament meets. The House is very ticklish about treachery. There's no saying how things might go; and he dare not—no, he *dare* not risk a general election. The 'man in the street' says it's all your doing. Fred, mind I know nothing for certain."

Lord Bellinger pondered. "Has anybody confessed anything?" he asked, after some consideration.

"Nobody who *had* anything to confess!" answered his friend with a smile. "The only man who could have told them what they wanted

to know wisely took himself out of the way. That idiotic newspaper which Sir Alexander has been flourishing over his empty head made a better shot than usual. There has been a spy among us, no doubt, and rumour mentions one or two names—I dare *not*. The fortune-teller, I can well believe, had a finger in the pie; and people go so far as to say that meetings were held in his house between staunch Hanoverian friends of yours and mine, and other friends of ours who are supposed to be over the water and unable to come back. Also, that arms were found in his cellar, and gunpowder under his bed! All this goes in at one ear and out at the other; but there's an ugly story about some royal warrants that were never served; and I can tell you for certain a very great man holds your lordship to blame."

"Because my cowardly servants wouldn't back me up, and I couldn't fight a score of men single-handed!" exclaimed Lord Bellinger indignantly. "Those were the very warrants that gaol-bird took out of my coach. I see the whole thing now, and how cleverly it was done! I'm in a false position, Harry, to say the least of it. The treason I don't so much mind; but I cannot bear to think I should have been so 'bit.' Harry! Harry! I shall be the laugh of the town!"

"'Faith, when the town comes to learn it, I think you will!" replied his friend. "But, in the meantime, 'tis as much a secret as anything can be that is known to half a dozen people. I'm the only man in this room who has heard a word

of it ; you may see that for yourself. The conjurer, or whatever he is, has departed without beat of drum. I need hardly observe that when they sent to arrest him he had eight-and-forty hours' start. The house was shut up, and they were forced to break in the door. I am told, when they did search it, they found an empty bottle on the table, an empty chair at the fireplace, and an empty skull on the chimney-piece. There were no directions left where the owner was to be found ; but I understand many very respectable people want him sadly now he's gone!"

"That's another difficulty," mused Lord Bellinger. "We shall never get money at such short notice from anybody else. If you paid enough for it, you could take it away with you then and there. He was a most useful person, and I shall miss him prodigiously for one. However, that is not the question. Harry, you have a head on your shoulders ; what would you do in my place?"

"Get into my chair, and wait on the minister at once," answered his friend. "When a man knows he is in the wrong, he should always take the bull by the horns. The Scotchman believes you have been tampering with the other side, and, thinking it more formidable than it is, will scarce venture to break with your lordship, once for all. It is but a game of brag, Fred, and the boldest player wins. We will sup here together at nine o'-the-clock, and you shall tell me how you came off."

So Lord Bellinger, taking his friend's advice,

mounted gravely into his chair, and caused himself to be set down without delay at the minister's official residence, where he found the great man holding a levée, composed of the many who came to ask for something, and the few who returned to give thanks.

It chafed his lordship in no slight degree to be kept waiting in the ante-room while meaner men, not half so well-dressed, were admitted to the presence of the minister. His own equals in rank and position nodded to him as they passed in and out, but their greetings at such a time were necessarily short and formal, so that he was unable to gather from their manner how widely his failure had become known, or how deeply he was supposed to be disgraced. It was not till the mayor of a county town, a doctor of divinity, and a poor author who had helped to line many a trunk, were admitted before him, that his patience utterly failed. He was in the act of desiring his chair to be called, when a grave man, addressing him in broad Scotch, held open the door of the inner chamber, with an austere bow.

There were some half-score persons present, bearing the proudest names, holding the highest offices in the country. Lord Bellinger's quick eye did not fail to mark how each looked eagerly from the new-comer to the minister, as though to observe the nature of his reception.

More erect than usual, for his blood was up, but with the graceful bearing that never deserted him, his lordship stepped across the room and made a low bow, almost defiant in the excess of

courtesy which it seemed to affect. The minister, who was engaged with a paper in his hand, did not return the salutation for more than a minute. Lord Bellinger ground his teeth, and the by-standers glanced in each other's faces.

Presently the great man raised his head, stared coldly at his visitor, and returned his obeisance without a word.

The bystanders breathed freely; there was no more doubt, then, of their chief's displeasure, and they believed the interest of the scene was past. But, as they told each other afterwards, "Bellinger was a very awkward fellow to set down!"

"My lord," said he, "I have waited on your lordship in self-defence."

"My lord," was the answer, "your lordship's explanations must be made in public, and reserved for another place."

Then the minister turned on him a broad, ungainly back; and he knew that in the game of brag, concerning which Harry St. Leger spoke so hopefully, he had come off second best.

But he did not fail to keep his appointment at the Cocoa Tree, arriving there, indeed, somewhat earlier than the hour agreed on, and with an appetite no whit impaired by the contrarieties he had experienced. "It's the country air, I suppose," he observed lightly to his friend. "'Faith, Harry, should I be forced to retire into the country altogether, it won't break my heart if I'm always to be as hungry as now. Waiter, what can we have for supper?"

"Aitch-bone of beef, my lord," was the answer.

"Beg pardon, my lord, his Grace has finished the aitch-bone; his Grace never eats anything else. Cold game-pie, cold chicken and tongue, cold partridges, wild duck or teal, cold shoulder of mutton."

"Anything but *that*, you knave!" replied his lordship with a laugh. "No, no, Harry; I've had enough cold shoulder to-day to last me the rest of my life!"

CHAPTER XXI

DULVERTON REVEL

"THEE be'est a drunken old twoad!" exclaimed a buxom countrywoman, apple-faced and dark-haired, to her laughing mate, and not the least in tones of conjugal reproof, but rather as a delighted damsel of the present time might say to her degenerate admirer, "How *can* you be so silly!" while the strapping fellow's sides shook, and his honest face grinned from ear to ear at such homely jests and simple sights as both had trudged half a score of miles into Dulverton to enjoy. It was an hour or so after noon, and the Revel seemed at its height. Two or three booths offered the indispensable refreshment of cheese, cold meat, and cider. On the floor of a waggon, which formed his primitive stage, a jack-pudding, as he was called, performed certain antics, affording inexhaustible amusement to the spectators, who were never tired of watching him inflate his cheeks, loll out his tongue, eat lighted candle-ends, or feign to pull straws out of his eye. A fat lady, a giant, and a dwarf were respectively portrayed on the sides of a van, in which all three were supposed to be domiciled;

while a drum, fiddle, and brass instrument played appropriate airs without ceasing and cruelly out of time. The rustics, many of them stout moorland men from the wilds of Brendon and Dunkerry, or borderers of North Devon and West Somerset, with here and there a swarthy, broad-shouldered visitor all the way from Cornwall, strolled about, gaping, grinning, and drinking, in a high state of contentment and delight, each with a ruddy-faced damsel at his elbow, to whom, as occasion served, he offered his boisterous jest or rude and hearty salute. These gallants were mostly fine specimens of manhood, tall, straight, and well-limbed, with a frank, fearless air about them as though equally ready for a feast and a fray. The women, while of lower stature in proportion, were exceedingly comely, some even beautiful, dark-haired, dark-eyed, delicate of features, and with the bloom of health mantling in their cheeks. One and all wore garments of the bright colours and daring contrasts. One and all drank freely of cider and other liquors. One and all seemed resolved thoroughly to enjoy the present, and make the most of Dulverton Revel, seeing that it came but once a year.

The band had just concluded a flourish of more than ordinary discord, when a new arrival enhanced the excitement of the scene, causing a rush from all quarters to encircle the strange vehicle, partly van, partly cart, from which a pair of piebald horses adorned with bells were unharnessed and turned loose to graze. With a

dexterity that supplied the want of screws, bolts, and such mechanical appliances, its occupant quickly converted his carriage into a stage, on which articles of dress, perfumery, and domestic use were exposed for sale; while he moved nimbly about, flourishing over his head and displaying in turn laces, threads, scissors, thimbles, a mousetrap, a gridiron, and a warming-pan, to the intense delight of the bystanders. He was a meagre, active-looking man, who might have been any age above fifty, wearing large green spectacles to adorn a pale face and red nose, dressed in a blue coat bedizened with gold lace, a red waistcoat, bright yellow breeches, silk stockings, and an outrageously large cocked hat. Though his gestures were ludicrous, and his jokes received with peals of laughter, his voice was grave, even sad, and he never smiled; yet he had not occupied his post ten minutes before every other attraction of the Revel was deserted in his favour. The jack-pudding ceased his contortions, and embraced the opportunity to swallow a mouthful of real brandy instead of artificial fire. The giant, dwarf, and stout lady remained unsolicited in the retirement from which they had not yet emerged; and even the strains of the band died away into empty air without eliciting a single protest of disapproval or regret. Dulverton Revel congregated itself round the stranger, and the stranger seemed in all respects equal to the position.

"Haste thee, wench," said every Jack to his Gill, accompanying the hint with a dig in his lady's ribs; "thic' be the vun o' the vair, I tell

'ee! Do 'ee lose never a morsel. Gie I a buss, that's a good wench, and I'll warrant I'll vind thee a fairing!" After which elegant address, and a struggle for the salute thus purchased in advance, the rustic pair elbowed their way into the circle round the cart in a high state of glee and delight.

The proprietor addressed his audience with the utmost volubility, offering them, one after another, the different wares exposed for sale, and making appropriate remarks on each. An ointment for sore eyes, that would enable the purchaser to see through a brick wall; a salve for sore lips, that would cause the opposite sex to imprint kisses whenever they came within reach; a pocket-mirror that, looked into by sunrise on May-day, would reflect the future sweetheart's face; a mousetrap that would rid a house of vermin from the moment it was set on the kitchen floor; a warming-pan that retained conjugal love and discovered conjugal infidelity; lastly, a pair of female garters, the only pair left in stock, manufactured expressly for the Queen of Egypt, and possessing the miraculous power of rendering their wearer invisible in the dark!

After brisk competition these desirable appendages were knocked down to a demure and blushing damsel, who was forthwith requested, in a stentorian voice, to "try them on at once, and see how they fit."

Ere the laugh elicited by this audacious suggestion could die out, the vendor's eye, travelling round that circle of grinning faces,

had recognised two acquaintances in the crowd. Also, and this seemed of greater moment, he suspected they recognised him in return. Of these the first was a square, thick-set man, in clerical attire, being indeed none other than Parson Gale. The second, tall, slender, swarthy, supple of limb and graceful of gesture, was Fin Cooper the gipsy. Each attended Dulverton Revel less for pleasure than business. The Parson, sore of heart, and brooding over his wrongs, was yet so far hampered by the necessities of domestic life that he had been obliged to ride down from the moor to this festivity for the purpose of engaging a kitchen wench, and, his establishment bearing no high character for regularity and decorum, there appeared some difficulty in filling the situation.

In those convivial times no affair, even of the most private nature, could be conducted without a great deal to drink, and the Parson, pledging one honest farmer after another in hard cider, dashed with villainous brandy, had arrived at a very morose and uncomfortable state, sober enough in head, but fierce, bitter, and sullenly despondent at heart.

Not so Fin Cooper. That worthy, who was indeed a temperate fellow by preference, whose frame had been toughened from childhood by continuous exercise, and who never slept under a roof in his life, possessed a constitution on which no stimulant less powerful than raw spirit seemed to produce the slightest effect. On the present occasion he had reasons of his own for

keeping his wits at their brightest. Dulverton Revels, like all other gatherings of the Gorgios, afforded to every true Romany many opportunities for gain and peculation. There was jewellery to be exchanged with ardent suitors and the objects of their admiration. There were games to be played at cards with yokels patient of loss. There were horses to be sold, swapped, or even stolen, when occasion offered. There were a thousand ways and means, all more or less profitable, by which the gipsy could take advantage of his natural prey.

But Fin Cooper had yet another object, causing the dark eye to glance from face to face in restless search, the tawny hand to steal unconsciously under the wide sash that swathed his waist towards the handle of his knife. His suspicions that the girl he loved had set her heart on a ruffling Gorgio confirmed themselves day by day. Dulverton feast would be a convenient place of meeting, and he had told Thyra that he himself meant to be twenty miles off. If she held an assignation here with her Gentile lover, he might be a witness to their interview, might verify her bitterest fears, and satisfy himself of the worst! Fin Cooper's face was evil to contemplate while he revolved this contingency, and the salesman, delivering the garters to his blushing customer, did not fail to draw his own conclusions from its scowl.

As for Parson Gale, he stood before the cart for several minutes in mute astonishment. Then he rubbed his eyes, stared, and exclaimed,

"Katerfelto! as I'm a living sinner!" while he brought his broad hands together with a vigorous smack.

His exclamation was not lost on its object. The latter glanced stealthily round, bowed profoundly to his auditors, made them a little speech, in which, with many jocose allusions, he informed them he was about to shut up shop that he might eat his "bit of dinner," with a promise to reopen again at three o'clock, and in a very few minutes the cart had resumed its usual appearance and the proprietor had disappeared.

Half an hour later, behind a canvas screen, on the outskirts of the Fair, a priest and a gipsy might have been seen in earnest conversation, pacing to and fro, while they glanced about them as if loath to be overheard, though a donkey rolling on its back, and a horse tugging at a truss of hay, were the only eavesdroppers they had to fear. The gipsy's air was respectful, even deferential, while he listened to his companion. The latter seemed annoyed and distrustful. In his cunning, clever face might be read an expression of disappointment, and something amounting to self-reproach.

"How long is it since I dwelt with your people in their tents and did my best to withhold the old Petulengro from the journey that grows easier at every step? It must be more than seven years," said the priest.

"Seven years and seven months, O my father!" replied Fin Cooper, "and you promised

to teach me how to read the stars aright the night before you went away."

"Yet you knew me to-day, Fin! knew me dressed up like a jack-pudding who tumbles to amuse a score of clowns in a fair?"

"I would know you, father, if you were buried and dug up again. I would know you in another life, if there *is* another life. Some things the gipsy never forgets. Father, I am your servant; all I have is yours. It is not much. Only a quick eye, a ready hand, and a sharp knife. Do you not *wish* to be known?"

There was no mistaking his meaning. Katerfelto, notwithstanding his perturbation, felt a thrill of triumph thus to have imposed on the credulity of this rude yet keen-sighted nature. There is professional vanity in every calling, even in that of the professional impostor.

"My life is in danger, Fin," answered the charlatan gravely, "so far as it may be threatened by the casualty of this lower world. Worse than that, I might lose my liberty if I could be identified here for the sage and philosopher who always made it his boast that he is the gipsy's friend. Therefore I came to the West in the disguise you saw me wear an hour ago. Therefore I speak to you now, dressed as one of those Jesuit priests whom your people have so often sheltered at their need; therefore will I appeal to them for a refuge till I can steal down to the coast and put the blue sea between the gipsy's friend and those who would do him harm. *Shoon tu*, dost thou listen, my son? Said I well?"

"*Tatchipen si, Meero Dado!* You speak truth, O my father," answered the other. "And you will lodge with us to-night on the moor. The fullest platter shall smoke, and the softest blanket be spread, for the gipsy's friend!"

Katerfelto shook his head. "If I came to your tent and claimed my own, Fin," he asked, "would your welcome be so hearty and free?"

The gipsy's face fell. "I love her," he said. "She was given to me long before you bought her from our people. You told me I should have her back at some future time, father, the morning you took her away. I reminded her of it only yesterday."

The other glanced sharply at him from under his bushy eyebrows. This was scarcely as he expected. Judging from all he knew, he calculated that Waif must have accompanied John Garnet into the West, and had vowed from the moment he discovered her flight that he would be revenged on both, while he supposed they were in hiding together. He now saw that she must either have required the assistance of her tribe or found it impossible to elude their observation. He knew quite enough of the girl to be sure that even while with her own people she would find opportunities to meet her lover, and from that lover, lately his own emissary, he was still inclined to exact the penalty that all paid, sooner or later, who ran counter to the designs of Katerfelto.

"Keep her in your tents, Fin," said he with a smile, "and fear no hindrance from me. But

remember, though she is of a wandering nature, and comes of a wandering race, a Romany lass may wander too free and too far."

Fin's dark face turned black as night. "I understand you, father," he muttered. "You mean—you mean that she has a Gorgio lover!"

The veins in his handsome throat swelled while he spoke, and his voice came so thick it was hardly intelligible. "I mean," answered Katerfelto coolly, "that he whom the Gorgios call John Garnet is better out of the way, as well for you and for me as for Waif. He knows too much, and he dares too much. Your eyes are as keen as a hawk's, Fin. Can you not see that as he cozened me out of my horse he would cozen you out of your bride?"

The gipsy's low, smothered laugh seemed the very reverse of mirth.

"There is no better sheath for a Romany's blade," he answered, "than the bowels of a pampered Gorgio."

"My son," replied the other, "wisdom is the child of experience. Let King George take the trouble off your hands, and pay you besides a purse of gold for your forbearance. John Garnet's is a hanging matter, and a reward of one hundred guineas is offered for his apprehension. Set the bloodhounds on him at once, and the thing is done. Better by far keep that long knife of yours for cutting your bread and cheese!"

"I helped him," said Fin thoughtfully, "helped him, because Thyra bade me, as frankly as if he

had really been poor Galloping Jack come down from Tyburn tree. The bloodhounds might turn round and lay hold of the informer. Counsel me, father. I can right myself so easily with three inches of steel!"

The other shook his head. No man alive had fewer scruples of mercy or forbearance, but it was Katerfelto's nature to plot rather than execute. While he would have felt no qualms in concocting or administering a subtle poison, he shrank from the very idea of personal contest and shedding of blood. "A hundred guineas of red gold," he answered; "think of that, Fin, and then talk about a hand's-breadth of bare steel! You cannot compare them. Be advised by me, my son, and you will rid yourself of a rival, win a bride, and gain a wedding portion all in one sentence. That Exmoor parson. I saw him here to-day. I would venture a wager he is drinking in one of the booths now. Watch for him riding home. He is a magistrate; never fear him for that. Lay your hand on his horse's mane and say to him in the King's name, 'I can show you the man you want—follow me!'"

"But would he not ask for the hundred guineas and get them himself?" argued the gipsy, who, with all his strong passions, had a keen eye to the main chance. "There is no justice nor fair dealing on either side between the Romany and the Gorgio."

For the first time during their interview Katerfelto laughed outright.

"My son," he said, "I think I can trust you to

look after your own interests without assistance from me. When you have delivered John Garnet into the hands of Abner Gale, you will have accomplished your object and mine. For my own part, I will not return into the Fair. I need hardly ask, Fin, if you are here alone?"

"We are like the hooded crows, my father," answered Fin. "When you see one of us, you may be sure there are others not far off. We must needs hang together, or the Romany would soon be swept from the face of the earth."

"Then let one of your people drive my cart to Exeter," continued Katerfelto. "He will know where to leave it with no questions asked. As for me, my son, I must make my way to your tents without losing an hour. I have changed my disguise once to-day. I can change it a score of times, if necessary; yet I would not that roystering parson had recognised me but now in the Fair."

"I shall be alone with him on the moor presently," said Fin Cooper in a tone of meaning. "My father, do you desire that he should tell no tales? Shall I silence him once for all?"

Katerfelto pondered. "Not at present, Fin," he answered after a pause. "It will be better to make use of him when we want him, and put him on the right scent. If a hound runs counter, the farther he goes the farther he is left behind!"

CHAPTER XXII

A WARRANTABLE DEER

MEANTIME John Garnet, enjoying the golden hours at Porlock with the carelessness of his nature, thought no more of the toils that surrounded him than the wild deer of the forest thought of the many preparations made for its capture; of the good horses stabled, the staunch hounds fed, the distances travelled by lords and ladies, the laced coats tarnished, the bright spurs reddened, the jingling of bit and bridle, the gathering of horsemen and varlets, the energy expended in a chase that must be followed with so much pomp and circumstance for its especial downfall. Large and stately, gliding from field to field, it passed through the twilight, like some majestic ghost, to crop the yet unharvested grain, or tear the juicy turnips from the earth, with appetite unimpaired by misgivings of to-morrow, rejoicing in its pride of strength, trusting implicitly in those fleet, shapely

limbs that bore it lightly over its native moor as the wild bird's pinions waft her through the air.

How many centuries have elapsed since the fatal morning that saw the Red King mount for his last ride through the stately stems of Bolderwood! How many since that woeful hunting in Chevy Chase which began in joyous notes of hound and horn, to end in the battle-cry of the Percy, the sword-strokes of the Douglas, and the pouring out like water of the bravest, noblest, gentlest blood two countries could afford! Yet has the pursuit of the wild animal by the instinct of the tame continued to be the favourite sport of Englishmen from those rude times to our own, while now, as then, many a bold, adventurous nature, panting for an outlet to its energies, finds engrossing occupation in the pleasures of the chase.

Taken in good sense and moderation, as each man's discretion teaches him to judge, the draught thus offered by a bountiful Providence, which provides for our mental health the sweet no less freely than the bitter, is exhilarating in the extreme. It rouses our manly qualities of mind and body, excites our intellectual faculties and our muscular powers, braces the nervous system, stimulates to healthy effort the vital force of arm and heart and brain. Many of the most distinguished men in every time have been fond of hunting. Few men fond of hunting but are frank of nature, kindly, generous, unselfish, and good fellows, to say the least!

If such a position be granted, it follows that all hunting, conducted in a spirit of humanity and

fair play, is more or less to be esteemed. The stout sexagenarian who halts his steady cob on a hill, and from that point of vantage watches in the valley below his ten couple of beagles unwinding and puzzling out the line of a hare that has just crossed under his pony's nose, without assisting them by so much as a whisper, is a sportsman to the backbone. No music on this lower earth can ravish his ears like the tuneful cry of his little darlings, who are indeed nothing loath to hear their own voices, and refuse to hunt a yard without assuring each other that it is all right. No triumph can afford him greater pleasure than his ride home to dinner with a hare dangling across his saddle, honestly killed by the patience and perseverance of that tedious pursuit which has fairly wearied her to death! And when he lays his head on his pillow, before his closing eyes passes a vision of Challenger opening in the turnips, of Rock-wood and Reveller feathering with scarce a whimper up the stony lane.

Surely his enjoyment is undeniable as that of his converse, the scarlet-coated hero in vigorous manhood, who bestrides three hundred guineas' worth of blood and symmetry, while he watches a gorse covert shaking under the researches of twenty couple of high-bred foxhounds, wild with eagerness to push up their game and dash after him over the sea of grass that lies spread around, like falcons on the wing. A physiologist might study to advantage the countenance of the rider; an artist would long to portray on canvas the attitude of the horse.

These two friends, loving each other dearly, are moved by a common sympathy. Simultaneously the eyes of each brighten and their hearts beat fast. A crash of music from two score merry voices proclaims that a fox has been found, a hat held up against the sky-line, and, after a discreet interval, one long, ringing holloa announce that he is away! That joyous excitement for which some men are content to live, and even in a few sad cases to die, has begun in good earnest now, and trifling, puerile as it may seem, I doubt whether any pursuit in life affords for the moment such intense gratification as "a quick thing over a grass country, strongly enclosed, in a good place, and only half a dozen men with the hounds!"

Rider and horse, I say, are moved by a common sympathy: science and conduct being furnished by the man; strength, speed, and courage by the brute. From field to field they speed rejoicing, facing and surmounting each obstacle as it presents itself, with a varied dexterity of hand and eye that amounts to artistic skill, and even should unforeseen difficulty or treacherous foothold entail a downfall, rising together, parted, but not at variance, each perfectly satisfied with the efforts of his friend. Then, when the rattling burst is over, and the hounds are baying round a good fox who has never turned his head from the distant covert that killing pace alone forbade him to reach, how fond the caress laid by stained glove on reeking neck, how proudly affectionate the muttered words of praise a generous animal interprets by their tone, "You're the best horse

in England. I never was so well carried in my life!"

But of all forest creatures hunted by our forefathers and ourselves, the stag has been considered from time immemorial the noblest beast of chase. His nature has been the study of princes, his pursuit the sport of kings. The education of royalty itself would once have been thought incomplete without a thorough knowledge of his haunts and habits, while books were written, and authorities quoted, on the formalities with which his courteous persecutors deemed it becoming that he should be hunted to death. To this day the royal and gallant sport flourishes in West Somerset and North Devon with its former vigour. When George the Third was king, that wild, romantic western county was already famous for staunch hounds, untiring horses, and daring riders, no less than for the strength, size, and lasting qualities of its red deer.

An animal that can fly twenty miles on end for life, and die with its back to a rock, undaunted in defeat, a true gentleman to the last, is surely no unworthy object of pursuit.

But what are these shadows that cross the Barle by moonlight, with the water dripping like molten silver off their sides as they emerge one by one from the glistening stream to disappear again in the black night of its overhanging woods? And is not that their king who lags behind, with beam and branches of those widespread horns flashing in points of white as he stoops his crowned head to drink, and passes on? No shadow this, but

a stately beast in all the strength and beauty of its prime. A stag of size and substance, with goodly fat on his ribs and many tines on his antlers. Thickening, too, somewhat in the neck, for already the clear air of an autumn night tells of early frosts, and soon the peaceful majesty of his repose will change to turmoil of love and war. In the meantime he feeds lazily on, turning without apparent object in a different direction from the herd.

Thus he wanders over a broad surface of country—now cropping the rank grasses that border the Exe, ere he dashes through its swift and shallow stream as though disdaining a bath that only reaches to his knees. Anon dallying with the standing oats, that pine thin and scanty on a bare hill-farm, by the verge of the forest; then crossing the swampy skirts of Exmoor at his long jerking trot, to rouse the bittern and the curlew from their rest, he makes his way by many a broken path and devious sheep-track to the impervious coppices and steep wooded declivities of Cloutsham Ball. It is an hour or two before dawn when he reaches this well-known haunt, and the lordly beast, penetrating to its inmost thicket, lays himself down with the intention of sleeping undisturbed till late in the day.

With an indolent hoist of his haunches, that hardly seemed an effort, he has cleared the hazel-grown bank round his resting-place in a spring that covered some five or six yards, but left embedded in the yielding clay a distinct impression of his cloven feet. Therefore Red Rube, stooping

over the slot at daybreak, chuckles inwardly, and observes to his flask, "A warrantable deer!" kneeling down to examine the footprint more closely, and measure its width by the fingers of his own brown hand. Then he takes a wide circuit, embracing several favourite passes for deer, and satisfies himself that save one light hart or "brocket," as he calls it, not another animal of the species is this morning harboured in Cloutsham Ball.

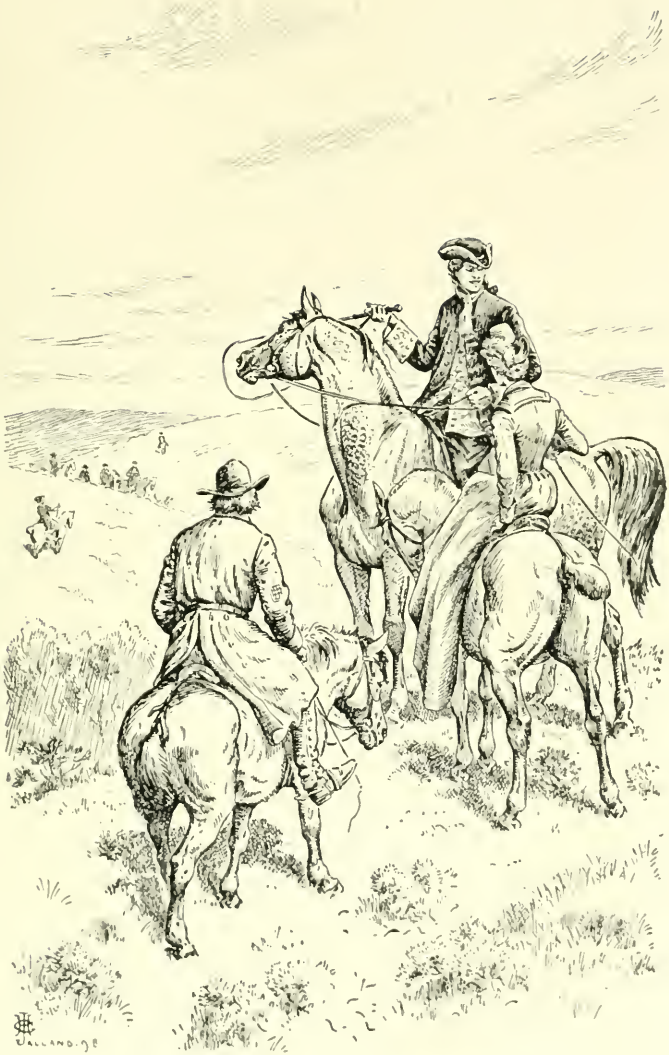
The staghounds are to meet some two miles off to the eastward. It must be travelling that distance with the sun in his eyes that causes Red Rube to blink and grin and occasionally hiccough all the way to their accustomed trysting-place.

He is there betimes with his broken-kneed pony, yet two riders have arrived before him. Rube chuckles and sidles up to them.

"Your servant, Mistress Carew—your servant, your honour," says he in a deferential tone. "The spurs had need be sharp to-day, master. I'll warrant there'll be wicked riding, with the likeliest lass in Devon looking on!"

Nelly Carew deserved the epithet. The close-fitting blue habit so well set off her trim figure, the saucy little hat was so becoming to her fresh delicate face, that it seemed no wonder John Garnet's eyes should be fixed on his beautiful companion rather than on the opposite ridge of moor, over which hounds and horsemen were expected every moment to appear.

And Nelly, too, was more than proud of her cavalier. How handsome she thought him, and



FOR HERE COME THE HOUNDS.

how princely, with his dark eyes, his ruddy cheeks, his pleasant, careless smile, and clustering hair. Never another rider in the West, thought Nelly, could sit his horse so fairly, and where in the bounds of England was the steed to compare with Katerfelto? "I used to think Cowslip the most beautiful creature in the world," said she, patting her favourite's neck; "but your horse has quite put me out of conceit with mine."

"I know *who* is the most beautiful creature in the world," answered John Garnet, not unconscious that he had arrived at the idiotic stage of his malady. "I have never seen her equal, and never shall; but we'll argue that point going home," he added, while his bright eye grew brighter. "There's no time to wrangle now, sweet Mistress Nelly, for here come the hounds!"

Cowslip and Katerfelto raised their heads at the same moment, with pointed ears, and eager, solemn eyes; the grey indulging in a snort of approval and delight.

The cavalcade, consisting of huntsman, hounds, a whipper-in, and half a score of sportsmen, were to be seen filing across the moor in slanting line down the opposite hill.

John Garnet tightened his girths. "It won't be long before the fun begins," observed this impatient young man.

Nelly laughed. "When you know our country better," said she, "you will find out that a mile in distance with a coomb to cross sometimes means a good half-hour's ride. Let us go and

meet them," she added, putting Cowslip into a canter. "Here comes my aversion, Master Gale."

The Parson, mounted on his staunch black nag, was within a bowshot, trotting softly through the heather, husbanding strength for the exertions of the day. Even to John Garnet's eyes, prejudiced as he was by Nelly's dislike, there seemed much to admire in the bearing of man and horse. The free, stealing action, the close and easy seat, the light hand, the well-bitted mouth, the confidence of the one, the docility of the other, and the good understanding prevailing between them, argued a partnership that prided itself on encountering difficulties and setting danger at defiance in concert.

"He looks like business, that parson of yours," said John Garnet to his companion, as they bounded away together; "if he's half as good in the pulpit as he seems in the saddle, they ought to make him a bishop!"

Nelly's only answer was a little grimace of disgust, followed by a loving smile.

Meeting the assemblage of stag-hunting sportsmen, already increased by fresh arrivals, who turned up from every quarter as if they were the natural growth of the moor, John Garnet could not but observe that many a practised eye travelled approvingly over the symmetrical shape of Katerfelto ere it rested on the better known beauty of Mistress Carew. The honest squires whispered each other with nods, winks, and looks of intelligence.

"'Tis a rare bit of horseflesh!" said one in a

faded scarlet hunting-frock with tarnished lace. Strong as a yoke of bullocks, and light as a January brocket. Seems to me, neighbour, I've seen that nag before."

"Like enough," was the answer. "Thof I never thought to clap eyes on's rider again. That's the lad robbed Sir Humphrey and his three varlets single-handed a twelvemonth gone last Whitsuntide, by Upcot Sheepwash, and showed six hours afterwards in the market at Taunton town. It's fifty miles, squire, if it's a furlong. Ay, ay, a good horse, neighbour, and a bad trade."

"I heard tell he was hanged!" said the listener, opening round eyes of astonishment.

"He did ought to have been," replied the other. "But Galloping Jack had good friends in the West, and a good friend he's been himself, not so long ago neither, to one or two honest fellows you and me would be main vexed to see called to account. Live and let live, says I; but if we find a right stag in yonder hazels who knows his way to the sea, why, that grey horse and its rider are bound to be at one end of the hunt, and I leave it to you, neighbour, to say which!"

With these words he dismounted heavily to adjust girths and bridle, for Red Rube was already in close confabulation with the huntsman, and business seemed about to begin.

The harbourer looked more than half-drunk, yet not for an instant was that sagacity of his at fault which partook rather of animal instinct than human experience.

"The old stag will move the brocket," said he, with a laborious wink, "and it's your business to drive him to the moor, Abel. I'll warrant I bring you within a land-yard of 'un, and all as you've got to do is to catch 'un if you can!"

"Tancred and Tarquin will do that much," replied Abel, a man of few words; and in less than a minute those venerable "tufters" were uncoupled and at his horse's heels, forcing their way through the tangled underwood.

To control twenty couple of hounds hunting different lines is no easy matter. One or two are held in command without difficulty, so that their staunch pursuit may be transferred from scent to scent till they have forced the right deer into the open, when they can be stopped, while the body of the pack are brought up and laid on. Then for the crash, the chorus, the jubilee! Hark together! Hark! and Forrard away!!

The brocket's heart beats fast at the first note of the tufters, and well it may. Tancred and Tarquin are two majestic black-and-tan hounds, six-and-twenty inches high, with sweeping ears, pendent jowls, and large lengthy frames, nearly as heavy as himself. For one palpitating moment the wild deer's instinct prompts him to leap from his lair, and scouring at speed across the moor to seek the distant fastnesses of Swincombe, the gorge of Badgeworthy, or wheeling down-wind, like a bird on the wing, by Culbone slopes, to take refuge in the hanging woods of Glenthorne where they fringe the Severn Sea. But the next, a deep, loud, and melodious roar seems to paralyse

his very heart, and he crouches to the earth, scarce daring to move an ear. Suddenly the branches crash behind him, an antlered head looms wide and stately between him and the sky, while he leaps to his nimble feet in a bound that is hastened by the sharp thrust of a horn against his haunch. In less than a minute the old stag couches in the young one's lair, and the brocket, scared with fear, is darting across the moor like an arrow from a bow.

"Hark back, Tancred! Tarquin! TARQUIN! hark back!" Morose and solemn, conscientiously, yet sore against the grain, these veterans desist from their pursuit, soon to be rewarded for this disciplined sagacity by a nobler quarry, a higher and stronger scent. But for a leap that covers twenty feet of distance, and lifts his antlers twice his own height in air, the old stag's flank would be torn by Tancred's reeking muzzle, his haunches crushed under Tarquin's weighty paws. But no! with half a dozen bounds he crashes through the hazels, speeds up a narrow glade, and emerges stately and triumphant on the open moor.

Standing erect upon an eminence against the sky, he pauses one instant, as if to afford his pursuers an opportunity of noting his grand proportions and noble width of head. All eyes are turned towards him in admiration and delight.

"Beautiful!" exclaims Parson Gale, forgetting the existence of John Garnet and the terms of his own wicked oath.

"Beautiful!" whisper the lovers, exchanging a

lover's glance, while Katerfelto's rider feels a thrill of delight creep through his whole frame with the consciousness of his horse's speed and endurance; nor can Nelly herself spare him more than half her attention, so taken up is she with the gallant appearance of the deer.

"Beautiful!" echo the honest squires and yeomen, already speculating on the line, and anticipating the severity of the chase, while Red Rube, with his hand pressing Abel's knee, who is laying on his hounds with a cheer, thus delivers himself:—

"Brow, bay, and tray, I tell 'ee, with four on the top! All his rights, as I'm a living sinner, a warrantable deer, if ever there was one, or I'll eat 'un, horns and all!"

He pauses one instant.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT FAULT

IN the first ten minutes of a run with hounds everything else must needs be forgotten, for in these minutes men cast to the winds all earthly considerations but one, namely, how to get as close to the chase as possible, and keep there! It is not too much to say that a league of heather had been traversed at speed ere Parson Gale found he could spare a thought for anything but the holding together of Cassock, and the making the most of that good horse's powers.

His skilful riding, however, and intimate knowledge of the country, soon enabled him to draw rein on a slope of rising ground, while the line of chase, bending towards him where he stood, afforded a general survey of the whole pageant as it swept on.

The hounds, stringing in file through its tall luxuriant heather, threaded the deep, dim coomb he had skirted as judiciously, in a sinuous line, like some spotted serpent of gigantic length. Seen from the vantage-ground above, they seemed to be running at no great pace, though with much energy and determination; but John Garnet, who had plunged into the valley at their sterns, could

have told a different tale. It taxed even Katerfelto's powers to keep on terms with them as they rose the opposite hill, Tarquin and Tancred swinging along at head with a steady persistency that implied endurance till the close of day. Except the stranger on the grey horse, not another rider was within a mile of the pack. Abel had adopted the same line, though not quite so skilfully, thought the Parson, as himself, and was leading his active, cat-like little horse up a precipitous ascent to regain the ground he had lost. Mistress Nelly could be seen on the white pony, a speck in the distance, making for some rocks on the moor, where her experience taught her the deer was likely to pass, and was followed by no inconsiderable cavalcade. Other sportsmen rode at speed for other points, some in bold relief against the sky-line, some mere spots of red on the brown expanse of moor, all with their horses' heads in different directions, yet each persuaded that his own line was the best, and would eventually land him alone with the hounds!

Alas for the fallacies of experience itself when pitted against chance! Alas for the caution of age and the cunning of woodcraft! Alas for the heavy-weight rider and the horse that knew not how to gallop! After this one turn, of which the Parson so readily took advantage, the stag never paused nor wavered, but sped across the open straight as an arrow, six miles on end, without halt or hindrance, and the hounds ran him without a check.

"Curse him! curse him! how he rides!"

muttered the Parson, watching that grey horse sail over the moor in smooth and easy stride, like the stroke of a bird's wing, while John Garnet sat home in the saddle, and chose his ground with the judgment of one born and bred in the West. Katerfelto carried his master without difficulty alongside of the hounds; Parson Gale, half a mile off, with no immediate prospect of getting nearer, admired and envied the daring rider, even while he swore to have his blood.

Half a mile astern, in an enclosed country, is bad enough, but to be half a mile behind a good horse crossing Exmoor at speed with a pack of hounds in front is virtually to be in another kingdom! To save his life the Parson could not come within hailing distance of his foe, do what he would.

Yet he tried his wickedest! Cassock's sides were scored with the unaccustomed spur. Cassock's speed was taxed unfairly up steep incline and over level marsh. The black nag was as good a beast as ever looked through a bridle, but he carried a stone and a half more weight, and had neither the blood, nor the size, nor the speed and scope of Katerfelto. "He's a heavy deer," muttered the Parson, with an unclerical oath and a strong pull at his horse. "He'll hang in Badgeworthy woods, or soil in Badgeworthy water. It's the only chance in the game now, for at such a pace as this the farther I ride the farther I am left behind!"

Not once in a season, not once in ten seasons, had the Parson been so out in his reckoning.

The wild red deer, while he is the noblest and most courageous of those forest creatures that trust for safety to their speed, is also the most eccentric and unaccountable in his flight. Let us borrow the grey-speckled wings of the moor-buzzard hunting leisurely overhead, and accompany our stag through the rush-grown swamps of Exmoor, as he crosses its undulating surface at that free pitching gallop which he seems so rarely to hasten in alarm or to modify from fatigue.

His taper head and noble antlers are thrown slightly back, his dark and gentle eye seems fuller than in repose, but brightened by a consciousness of intelligence rather than by the tension of anxiety or distress. His nostrils are spread to catch the taint of an enemy in the breeze, and his mouth is open, while he is yet fresh and full of strength. When he closes it, there will be many a reeking flank besides his own, for wind and limb will have failed at last, and the only force left him then will be the courage to die. In the meantime he is all energy, vitality, and speed. To be hunted is but a generous rivalry that tests the powers in which his spirit takes pride, that wages his own endurance and sagacity against the hostile instinct of his natural enemy the hound. Speeding over the moor, it seems that he can mock at the untiring hate of Tarquin, Tancred, and their comrades, yelling on his track, fierce, busy, and persevering, but many a furlong in the rear.

Badgeworthy woods and copses frown darkling

before him. Badgeworthy water brawls in foaming jets and rippling eddies at his feet. The covert would seem to offer safety and concealment, the river to afford at least refreshment and temporary respite from pursuit. With a strange and wilful pertinacity, for which Parson Gale, labouring hopelessly behind, is at a loss to account, he shoots away from this tempting refuge of wood and water, coasting a precipitous hill that overhangs the stream, to speed along its dangerous incline at a pace that seems but to increase with the prospect of fresh exertions in an open country, unbroken by coomb, covert, or ravine for miles.

Even John Garnet, standing in his stirrups and easing Katerfelto, who has not yet demanded any such indulgence, begins to ask himself how long this kind of thing can last.

The sun is already high in a blue, cloudless heaven—blunt, grey boulders studding the steep hillside stand out in high relief, shilt and shingle glitter on the bare tops above, and bushy tufts of heather fade to a dusky purple below; but here and there green moss lies dank and soft round many a bubbling spring, while a breeze from the north fills lungs and nostrils with its cool, clear air, so that the deer, taking the wind sideways as it takes the hill, bounds on with ever-increasing speed, refreshed, invigorated, full of strength, and running still! The dark impervious glades, the deep precipitous ravines of Widdecombe are frowning yonder in the distance, though many a mile of moorland

intervenes ; they seem to offer a secure retreat, and even if he should be driven through that stronghold, and forced into the open once more, shall he not make his point in the cliffs beyond Combe-Martin, steering for yonder thread of blue on the horizon that promises death or freedom in the Severn Sea?

Who shall say that all this calculation, this strategy, this reflection, is so far below reason as to be called instinct? Even Red Rube, many a mile behind on his pony, taxing his resources of intellect and cunning, backed by the observation of fifty years, that he may arrive somehow at the finish in time to hear the "bay," confesses he is but a fool when his wits are pitted against those of a deer driven to its last shifts.

He is riding slowly and doggedly due west, without a soul in sight. He could not explain why he should have chosen this direction, but some mysterious instinct of the hunter tells him that thus only has he the slightest chance of seeing any more of the chase.

In the meantime vexation, confusion, and distress prevail for many a weary mile of rocky steep, tangled heather, and holding swamp. Here a good horse, floundering to the girths, emerges from the mire with a throbbing flank and staring eye that tell too plainly their own sad tale. His master, pretty well exhausted also in the struggle, standing hopelessly on foot, while friends and neighbours, in but little better plight, come labouring past, each man riding

faster than his horse, and pointing eagerly forward to that distance he must never hope to reach.

The last of the string, whose powers are dying out like the flame of a candle, sinks from a false and labouring trot to a reeling walk, which soon collapses in a dead stop.

"I've shot my bolt too, neighbour!" says the defeated sportsman to his comrade in distress. "It's many a long day since we've seen such a brush as this over Exmoor, and I'd try to finish the run now in my boots, only I've grown so plaguy lusty for climbing these hills!"

So they lead their horses homeward despondently enough, with many a longing, lingering look at those lessening forms that are yet far in rear of the actual chase, and many a speculation as to when it will end, what direction it will take, and who are the lucky ones with the hounds.

There can be no run so good in reality as that which we lose in imagination when beaten off by exigencies of country or pace.

Tancred and Tarquin are leading no longer. The grandson of the former, nearly an inch higher than himself, has come to the front, and for the first time since his puppyhood vindicates the purity of his lineage, and proves the staunch, determined qualities of his race. He has never hitherto run at head, but now, when the pace is best, he takes the scent from his grandsire by sheer force of nose and wind and speed. Not another hound in the pack can wrest from him

his post of honour in the front; and it is a pity that John Garnet, who knows nothing about him, and cares as little, should be the only man near enough to mark the excellence of his performance. Were they but there to see it, the young hound's dash and style, tempered by undeviating steadiness in pursuit, would fill Abel's eyes with tears, and call forth a blessing from Parson Gale's lips!

That keen sportsman is cursing volubly instead, though none the less does he take every advantage of ground, cut off every angle, and avoid every swamp in the line; therefore Cassock gallops steadily on at a fair, regulated pace, which neither increases nor decreases the disheartening interval between his rider and the hounds.

"I would give five years of my life," mutters the Parson, "to be lifted up by some supernatural power and set down half a mile, just half a mile, farther on!—ten to be riding that grey horse instead of the man who owns him! But the reckoning must come at last, and may my right hand wither at the wrist if I make it not the fuller and deadlier for every hour it is delayed!"

John Garnet, speeding away in front, on excellent terms with the hounds, and as happy as a king, little thought of the malice and hatred following in his track; little thought, indeed, of anything—unless it were Nelly Carew's blue eyes—but the keen enjoyment of his favourite pursuit. He was far too practised a horseman, however, to forget in his enthusiasm the normal rules of his art, and reflected more than once that

ON EXCELLENT TERMS WITH THE HOUNDS.

although he had never ridden an animal to be compared with him, yet Katerfelto was but a horse after all, and so far like other horses that at last his long powerful gallop must come to an end. Therefore he spared him as much as was compatible with his resolution not to leave the hounds, and kept his eye forward with considerable judgment and sagacity, so that when opportunity offered he might never throw a chance away.

Thus, while the pack, guided by Tancred's grandson, who bore the imposing name of Thunderer, dived into a precipitous ravine, he rode judiciously along its edge, and pulled his horse into a trot, while he watched them swarming and bustling through the gigantic growth of heather that fringed several hundred feet of an almost perpendicular incline. From thence he scanned the ground in front to find a more practicable descent, and down it he plunged without hesitation so soon as the hounds, giving tongue freely, dashed into the water below. It was a shallow, darkling stream, breaking and brawling over ledges of granite between high, steep banks, clothed in tangled underwood, and John Garnet could not but hope that now the deer had taken soil, and soon would burst on his ear that loud and welcome chorus called the bay. It disappointed him a little to observe the pack cross the stream, borne downward by its current, wading, swimming, shaking their ears and sides, while Thunderer informed them loudly that he was in possession of the scent.

It disappointed him still more when the grey horse had splashed and struggled through from bank to bank, that the hounds, whose noses had never yet been off the line for an instant, should be looking about them on the farther side with heads up and wistful faces gazing in his own as though half ashamed of failure, half pleading for assistance. There was no doubt they had come to a check, and appealed to the horseman for help he was unable to afford. The ground rose steep and high, the darkling copse that clothed these abrupt hillsides shut out the light of day. John Garnet was at a loss. Had the deer lain down? or was it forward still, and in which direction? He naturally looked for Tancred to inform him, but Tancred was nowhere to be seen.

The Parson, meanwhile, labouring doggedly on, had caught a distant glimpse of the hounds even as they disappeared over the brink of this precipitous coomb, in time to play a bold stroke that merited success. He determined not to cross the valley at all, but to steer for that side of it on which the line of chase now seemed to lie, and so hoped to come in on the deer, refreshed by the bath he never doubted it had indulged in, as it rose the hill once more and made for the open moor. Urging Cassock to further effort, he increased the pace for a stretch of another mile, but when he halted his good horse—who stopped willingly enough at the wished-for station—not a living object was to be seen dotting the brown expanse, not a sound to be heard but the

wail of the curlew flitting softly over the waste. Deer and hounds and John Garnet must have sunk into the earth! The solitude seemed unbroken, the chase had come to a standstill, and the Parson was at fault!

CHAPTER XXIV

AT BAY

TANCRED, a marvel of canine sagacity, had good reason for deserting his comrades, to engage in some quiet researches of his own. It is unnecessary to inform those who love stag-hunting—and those who do not will hardly care to learn—that scent often hangs over running water, and travels downwards with the moving stream; therefore the deer, wading craftily towards the river's source, emerged on its farther bank, refreshed and strengthened by the bath, at some considerable distance above the place where it plunged in. Such tactics were only in accordance with the calculation and reflection we call instinct; but Tancred was possessed of instinct too, and remembered, no doubt, many a cast he had made on similar occasions with successful result. The old hound therefore, assuming an expression of ludicrous solemnity, dashed through the water to enter without delay on a close scrutiny of his own along the opposite bank, in the reverse direction from that mistaken line on which his grandson was insisting with unbecoming clamour, and snuffled at every

pebble, poked his black nose into every tuft of brushwood, grass, or heather he came across. Soon, with a flap of his pendent ears, a lash of his stern against his mighty ribs, up went the wise and handsome head in a roar of triumph—a roar that, for the first, struck terror to the red deer's heart, some furlongs on in front—a roar that brought the old hound's comrades to his side with an alacrity sufficiently denoting how, by the best of all judges, this lord of the kennel was trusted and revered.

"He's forward!" exclaimed John Garnet, plunging through briar and brushwood, with the rein on Katerfelto's neck. "Hold up, old man! we shall soon be in the open again; and, by George, this is the best run you or I ever saw in our lives!"

These words of encouragement were addressed by the rider to his horse, as the latter scrambled sideways up a bank that would have taxed the agility of a goat. Gaining the top, they were rewarded by a spectacle that seemed equally to the taste of each. Through an open wood of grand old oaks, standing wide apart, ran twenty couple of powerful staghounds, majestic in shape, gigantic in stature, deep and rich in colour, stringing somewhat, it may be, as they passed in and out the gnarled substantial stems, but shaking the very acorns from the autumn boughs above, as that leafy canopy trembled to the music of their full sonorous cry. Katerfelto's neck swelled with delight, while he reached at his bridle for liberty to go faster still. The sun-

beams broke and sparkled overhead amongst the flickering green; the waving ferns lowered their banners in graceful homage as they bent and yielded underfoot; the dark moor, visible here and there through the trees, stretched to the horizon in front. The whole pageant seemed too beautiful for reality, and John Garnet felt as if he were hunting in a dream.

Emerging once more on the open, he found he was no longer alone with the hounds. "That must be a good black horse," he said to himself, and thought no more about it; for although, as a stranger in the county, he believed the run to have been perfectly straight, he was no ungenerous rival, and felt rather gratified that his pleasure should be shared by one who could appreciate its charm. He might want assistance too, he reflected, at the finish; for to kill a stag at bay, and rescue his carcase from the fangs of a pack of hounds, however tired, that had set him up, was no pleasant job to undertake single-handed in the wilds of Devon. Therefore he greeted the appearance of Parson Gale, galloping steadily towards him, with an encouraging wave of the arm and a jolly cheer.

The Parson's knowledge of woodcraft had served him at last. Of the few turns the deer made out of its direct line, this at least had been in his favour. It was in a strange tumult of mingled exultation and malignity that he now found himself almost within speaking distance of his rival, well within hearing of the hounds. "It must soon be over," thought the Parson,

"and he shall not boast he rode clean away from Abner Gale after all! Anyhow, Master Garnet, the deer cannot surely travel much farther, and then comes the reckoning between you and me."

But one notable peculiarity of this wild stag-hunting in the West is the impossibility of calculating on the endurance of a red deer. A light young hart, four or five years old, unencumbered by flesh, and with the elasticity of youth in every limb, can naturally skim the surface of his native wastes like a creature with wings; but it is strange that on occasion, though rarely, a stag should be found with branching antlers to prove his maturity, and broad well-furnished back to denote his weight, that can yet stand before a pack of hounds, toiling after him at steady three-quarter speed over every kind of ground, for twenty, and even thirty, miles on end. We can gauge to a nicety the lasting qualities of our horse—we have a shrewd guess at about what stage of the proceedings even such staunch hounds as Tancred and Tarquin must begin to flag; but the powers of a hunted stag defy speculation, or, as old Rube observed in his more sober and reflective moments, "'Tis a creatur' three parts con-trairiness and only a quarter venison. Why, even I can't always tell ye where to vind 'un, nor which road he'll think well to travel, nor how fur he'll go. Them as made 'un knows, I'll warrant; but there's many a deer lies in the forest as is one too many for Red Rube!"

It may be that the breeze was from the north bringing with it the keen salt savour of the sea; it may be that the deer, reckoning up its remaining strength, felt unable to traverse all that width of broken country which must intervene ere it could reach the sheltering heights of Seven Ash, or the dark gorge that shuts in Combe-Martin Cove between the cliffs; for, turning short to the right, it set its head resolutely upward, and the pace became more severe with every stride. The line, too, was exceedingly trying to hounds and horses from the undulating nature of the ground, intersected at every mile with deep and narrow coombs — unseen, till it was too late by judicious coasting to avoid their laborious steeps. Up and down these the deer travelled obliquely, using the broken sheep-tracks, that afforded but little foothold to a hound, and none whatever to a horse. Katerfelto began to lean on his bridle, and Cassock, following at a respectful distance, relapsed into a trot. Their riders also wished from their hearts that the thing would come to an end. There is but little satisfaction in the finest run on record if, spite of troubles, triumphs, pains, and perils, we never get to the finish after all.

But to one individual the turn thus taken at so critical a period of the chase was welcomed with exceeding gratitude and delight. Red Rube, on the broken-kneed pony, had hung perseveringly on the line instinct, rather than experience, prompted him to adopt. Steadily adhering to his western course, and keeping the high ground, he

was fortunate enough to hit on the chord of the arc, and travelled less than a mile for every two covered by the chase. Therefore, halting above the green slopes of Paracombe to listen, his ears tingled and his heart thrilled while he caught the dear familiar cry. "They do run ov 'un still!" exclaimed the old man, his grey eyes sparkling, and the colour rising in his wrinkled cheek; "and they do come nigher momently, for sure. He do mean 'soilin' in the Lynn, I'll warrant, but they'll set him up this side Waters-meet, I'll wager a gallon!" Then he consulted that elaborate map of the country he carried in his head, and admonished the broken-kneed pony with a touch of his single spur.

Now, Red Rube's proficiency in stag-hunting and Parson Gale's only differed in degree, nor was the divine very far behind the harbourer in knowledge of their favourite pursuit. He, too, could make his guess at the probable termination of the run, and husbanded Cassock's powers to the utmost, with shrewd misgivings, lest his horse should prove unable to outlast the deer.

Yes, the good stag must falter and fail ere long. His russet hide is blackened now with sweat and mire, his eye starts wild and bloodshot from his reeking head; he stops more than once to take breath and listen, but toiling on again labours heavily in his gait, and sways from side to side. Facing a steep hill, he breasts it gallantly, and, for the first time since he left his harbour, scales the ascent in a direct line for the top. Parson Gale, a mile behind, catches a

glimpse of him in the act, and plies his spurs freely, for he knows that now the game is played out.

John Garnet, too, who obtains a nearer view, is not surprised to see the stag come faintly back, ere he has mounted half-way up, and plunge downward into a thickly-wooded valley, dark and silent but for the brawling of a distant torrent in its depths. Crashing through the leafy underwood with a cry that grows louder, fiercer, and yet more musical, as they come nearer and nearer their game, Thunderer, Tarquin, Tancred, and the rest, dash eagerly forward, with flaming eyes, impatient of delay, and heads flung up at frequent intervals, as each hound catches its ravishing particles, and owns the transport afforded by the scent of a sinking deer. Crossing and recrossing the stream downwards, always downwards, they plunge and splash through the water, on the track of their prey, rousing the echoes with a yell and chorus that announce their certain triumph and cruel thirst for blood.

Nearer, clearer, deadlier, every moment, it rouses all the red deer's instincts of courage and defiance. If fight he must, he will fight at the best advantage and to the bitter end! His pitiless foes are not a hundred paces off, not twenty, not ten. But for a bound those failing limbs could only make in extremity of despair, they must have been upon him now, and would have got him down, had he not leaped out of their very jaws to a ledge of water-worn granite, whence he slips deftly into a pool that reaches his brisket,

and takes up a position of defence, with his back to an overhanging rock.

Right well he knows the advantage of standing firm on his legs, while his assailants must swim to the attack; and, lowering his head, delivers the thrusts of those formidable antlers with deadly effect. Hound after hound dashes in for the death-grapple, only to turn aside, worsted, if not overcome. Tarquin and Tancred, swimming warily out of distance, are watching their opportunity; and Thunderer, seamed from shoulder to flank, dripping with blood and water, bays wrathfully from the shore. Facing his death in the deep wild glades and rocky glens of beautiful Waters-meet, the stag seems undaunted still and undefeated, as when fresh from his leafy lair, bold and triumphant, he spurned the red mountain heather on the moor by Cloutsham Ball.

Admiration, dashed with pity, thrills John Garnet's heart, while he contemplates the noble creature thus defending himself, like a true knight, against overwhelming odds; but the hunter's instinct of destruction rises paramount, and, leaping lightly from his horse, he scrambles over the wet and slippery boulders, with some vague notion of affording assistance to the hounds.

It is not till he gains the rock beneath which the deer has taken refuge, and comes near enough to touch the animal with his whip, that he realises his own helplessness. He carries no hunting-knife, and his only weapons, a brace of horse-

pistols, are safe in Katerfelto's holsters, a hundred yards above him in the wood.

But Abner Gale is not thus to be caught at a disadvantage, and unarmed. He too has dismounted; and, rather from instinct than reflection, runs in behind the quarry with eight inches of bare steel in his hand. The Parson is an adept in all ceremonies of the chase, and no man knows better how to administer its deathstroke to a hunted deer.

The roar of the torrent, the continuous baying of the pack, drown all other noises; and John Garnet, stooping over the stag, while considering whether he shall noose the beast in his whip, and try to hold it till assistance arrives, little thinks so fierce an enemy stands behind him with his arm up to strike!

Now, it is but justice to say that the Parson, running in upon the red deer thus set up, and holding its own against the hounds, was wholly moved by the force of habit and the instincts of his craft. He, too, had pressed forward when he heard "the bay," and, leaving Cassock beside the grey horse, had rushed down with all the speed his heavy riding-boots permitted to cut the stag's throat from behind.

It was only when he looked from that hated rival, unconscious of his presence and within arm's-length, to the steel in his hand, that the hideous temptation came upon him; and while the sky seemed turning crimson, and the river running blood, through the stupefying roar of the water and deafening clamour of the hounds, a

whisper from hell, in the Tempter's own voice, bade him "Slay! slay!—Smite and spare not!"

Men undergo strange experiences at such moments, and live a long time in the dealing of a thrust or the drawing of a trigger! Parson Gale, glancing wildly round, believed that no human eye was on his movements; believed that, save for himself and his victim, the solitude was unbroken by human presence; believed that the devil in person was at hand to help him in his crime, and that this hellish tinge of crimson colouring sky and wood and water was a reflection from his wings!

His eye had already marked the spot where, between the shoulders of that laced hunting-coat, he could plant a blow that should pierce the very heart. He nerved himself, set his teeth, and raised his hand.

One convulsive effort of the braced sinews, one flash of the descending steel, a choking sob, a gasping cry, a hoarse rattle of the hard-drawn parting breath, and all would have been over; but even while the knife quivered in air, John Garnet turned his head, leaped to his feet, and caught his enemy by the wrist.

A yell of rage from the grey stallion, jealous of Cassock's approach, and rearing on end for an unprovoked assault, attracted his attention and saved his rider's life.

The green leaves shining in the sun wove bowers of fairyland overhead, the torrent plunged and roared and tumbled in foaming eddies round

that translucent pool, shining like silver through the dark tangled beauties of wooded Watersmeet.

Above stood two strong men, rigid, motionless as statues for the space of a full minute, locked in each other's grasp ; and below, leaping, swimming, dashing, retreating, traversing to and fro, the noblest pack of hounds in Europe clamoured round the stag at bay!

CAUGHT HIS ENEMY BY THE WRIST.

CHAPTER XXV

A BROAD HINT

"HOLD on, Parson! you've been and dropped your knife!" said a rough voice in Abner Gale's ear, while a dexterous snatch twitched the weapon out of his fingers. "Shame, gentlemen! shame!" continued Red Rube—for it was none other than the harbourer, who thus struggled up in the nick of time—"that two such noble riders should dispute about the honour of blooding a pack of hounds!"

Then stooping nimbly down, and seizing its branching antlers with one hand, while with the other he drew the Parson's hunting-knife across the stag's throat, he observed that in the huntsman's absence it was a harbourer's right to administer its deathstroke to the deer. Slowly, proudly, the stately creature's head dropped to the level of those eddying waters, already mantling in crimson circles with its blood. Fiercely, savagely, maddened by the work of slaughter, leaping and tumbling over each other in their eagerness to tear their prey, the hounds threw themselves on the carcase, and it required the efforts of all three men to preserve it from being foully mangled in their fangs.

Side by side, in silence, yet assisting each other and Red Rube with all their skill in woodcraft, the foes who had but now been grappling in a death-struggle, drew ashore, dismembered and disembowelled the dead stag, as if their only consideration were the authorised distribution of its venison and proper recompense of the hounds with blood.

It was not till the prescribed obsequies were fulfilled, till lights and liver had been set aside, the head sawn off, the slot, or forefoot, carefully severed for preservation in memorial of so fine a run, the paunch swallowed in eager gulps by the famished hounds, while Tancred and Thunderer growled at the two ends of a yard of entrails, and Red Rube, with bare, bloodstained arms, wiped the Parson's knife on a tuft of grass, but forbore returning it to its owner, that John Garnet, finding a moment's leisure, observed how three or four of the most fortunate riders had arrived, as though dropped from the clouds, in time to witness the finish before all was over. Amongst them he looked in vain for the pretty white pony and Nelly Carew.

In the congratulations exchanged, the ebullitions of excitement indulged in by these triumphant sportsmen, the Parson's moody scowl escaped remark, save by one whose whole life was spent in noting those trifling signs by which important results are indicated to the observing. Red Rube drew his own conclusions from the attitude in which he found those two foremost riders at the crowning catastrophe of the chase, and was

satisfied, while he marked his sullen glances and vindictive brow, that the Parson entertained some deeper and deadlier grudge against the more successful sportsman than could arise from a mere question of priority in cutting the deer's throat.

Now, Red Rube knew Abner Gale's character as well as he knew the surface of Exmoor Forest, and wanted none to tell him that the Parson's hatred meant persecution, by all means, fair and foul, even unto death! To John Garnet the harbourer had taken one of those fancies so often entertained by the old for those who might be their grandsons. He liked the young man's pleasant face and frank kindly manners; his enthusiasm for the chase; above all, his skill in the saddle and daring style of horsemanship; nor thought him less deserving because of a shrewd suspicion that he was the identical highwayman for whose capture a reward of one hundred guineas had been offered by his Sovereign Lord the King. Therefore—and it shows how high John Garnet must have stood in his opinion—Rube refrained from giving information of his hiding-place and claiming that large sum of money for himself. Therefore, also, he determined that, so far as he could prevent it, the Parson should do no mischief to this promising young stag-hunter; whom, moreover, he highly admired for his recklessness in thus appearing openly while so high a price was on his head. In short, he loved his new acquaintance better than his old friend and fellow-sportsman, better

even—and it is saying a great deal—than one hundred guineas in gold!

It is needless to observe that of those who reached the finish at Waters-meet before the "bay" was over, Abel the huntsman arrived first, making his appearance, indeed, immediately after Rube had cut the stag's throat. There seemed nothing more to be done, therefore, when the hounds, now thoroughly tired and footsore, had been satisfied, the jaded horses remounted, and the riders' different versions of their own doings exhausted for the present, than to jog slowly home, each in his own direction, with a happy chance of meeting more than one defeated sportsman, to whom he might repeat the oft-told tale, never weary of recapitulating the pace, distance, severity, triumphant conclusion, and whole chain of events that marked this memorable run.

John Garnet, turning to remount his horse, was surprised to find the animal in the custody of Red Rube, who handed his rein and held his stirrup with an officious alacrity foreign to his usual manner. The rider's first thought, no doubt, was for the well-being of his steed after so exhausting a performance; yet did he not fail to remark a peculiar expression on the harbourer's countenance, and the nervous haste with which the old man helped him into the saddle, pocketing the gratuity forced on him unconsciously, and by instinct as it seemed, without a word of thanks.

It was not till he had satisfied himself of Katerfelto's soundness, and felt the horse break

gaily into a trot, stepping free and true, that he gave a thought to Rube's flurried gestures and strange anxiety to start him on his homeward way, dismissing the subject from his mind without further comment, in the natural conclusion that the harbourer was drunk.

Then he abandoned himself to the exciting memories of the last few hours, exulting, as well he might, in the extraordinary speed and stamina of his favourite.

Meantime Parson Gale, seeking in vain for his hunting-knife, with a moody brow and many curses on his own carelessness in losing this favourite weapon, returned to his trusty Cassock, with the intention, no doubt, of following his rival, and calling on his brother-sportsmen to seize him in the name of the King. He was no mean judge of such matters, and in their late trial of strength found John Garnet fully his match. Unarmed, therefore, he determined not to encounter his enemy hand to hand, regretting his own folly in yielding to passion and endeavouring to slay him at disadvantage, thus warning him of danger and setting him on his guard. How much better, thought the Parson, to track him as old Tancred tracked a deer, never slackening in effort, never off the scent, never turning aside for any consideration, till he had run him ruthlessly down, delivered him into the hands of justice, and seen the last of him on Tyburn Hill.

It seemed to Abner Gale that his brother's blood cried out from the very stones, not to be

silenced nor appeased till his adversary stood in the hangman's cart, with the nightcap over his face and the fatal nosegay in his hand.

The poor black horse, however, instigated by no such thirst for vengeance, and desiring only the warmth and rest of its distant stable, was felt to be in a sorry plight so soon as it was burdened once more with the weight it had carried so gallantly through the day. Sore, stiff, and weary, it was hopeless to expect from it anything more than the very slowest trot. It bore besides, on crest and shoulder, marks of the grey stallion's unprovoked assault; nor were these calculated to soothe the vindictive feelings of its master. Many a bitter curse he ground between his teeth, reflecting that, for the present, he must abandon all hope of following up his enemy, and—for his angry mood forbade him to join in the talk of his excited brother-sportsmen—plod his homeward way as best he might alone.

How different were his feelings from those of the half-dozen friends and neighbours who had not half such good cause to be satisfied with their own performances in the chase! These laughed and jested merrily, in frank, hearty good-humour, praising the run, the country, each other's riding, and by implication their own, the huntsman, the harbourer, the stag, the horses, and the hounds. One or two trudged afoot up and down the steep inclines beside their weary steeds, all did their best to ease and indulge the staunch animals that had carried them so well; and each, while claiming for the rider a large share of credit

due to the horse, betrayed in his bearing the self-satisfaction of a man who has performed a good action rather than the sullen preoccupied air of one, like Abner Gale, who meditates a crime!

Though in the West of England, as in Ireland, distances from point to point seem held of less account than in other parts of the kingdom, those are a dozen or so of very long miles that stretch from Waters-meet to Porlock, after a good run with staghounds, on a horse that has been galloping all day. We should indeed be surprised could we calculate the extent of country over which the powerful stride of a hunter sweeps in such a chase as I have endeavoured to describe; and should marvel yet more were it possible to ascertain the exact distance traversed by a hound. The endurance of either animal seems truly wonderful when put to the test; but the real horseman is ever considerate to his "gallant and honourable friend," holding stoutly by the maxim—

> "Up hill spare me,
> Down hill bear me,
> On the level never fear me";

and believing this triplet of doggerel to contain the first principles of his art.

John Garnet, therefore, although he had long since discovered Katerfelto to be one of those rare horses that can begin again at the end of the day, did by no means suffer him to go his own pace home, restraining his generous impulses and riding him steadily along at very moderate speed.

I do not affirm, however, that his thoughts were entirely monopolised by this partner of his labours and his triumphs, or that he did not glance anxiously about him, from time to time, in search of the well-known figure on the white pony that occupied the first place in his fancy, and indeed the inmost citadel of his heart.

He was beginning to find those hours very wearisome which were spent apart from Nelly; and after its excitement had subsided, even so gallant a chase as that which he had lately witnessed was felt to be no equivalent for absence from her side.

There are moments when reflection seems to be forced on the most thoughtless of men; when the dream vanishes the illusion is dispelled, and they catch a glimpse of life as it is, not as they wish it to be. John Garnet, riding softly through the heather, reviewed the events of the last few weeks by the light of common sense, and wondered how this wild expedition of his, and wilder infatuation, was to end. That liberty and life were endangered by his offences against the law he had long been assured; but it was only to-day, and by the merest accident, he had discovered that here, in the vicinity of his hiding-place, lurked an enemy who thirsted for his blood. There was no mistaking the expression of the Parson's face; and had he not caught and held the uplifted wrist in a grasp more powerful than its own, he felt that his life-blood would have mingled in the eddies of Waters-meet with that of the dying deer. Now, when the excitement

of the strife was past, he shuddered to think of the hideous peril he had gone through, appreciating at the same time the vindictive hatred of such an enemy, whose brother he had slain in a midnight brawl, whose sweetheart he suspected he had won from him on the sands of Porlock Bay. In his place, thought John Garnet, he would have been as savage, no doubt; but, come what might,—banishment, imprisonment, hanging, or a stand-up encounter man to man,—nothing should ever force him to give up Nelly Carew!

His nerves must surely have been shaken by the severe exertions and strange experiences of the day; for a horse's head appearing suddenly at his knee, while its footfall was unheard amongst the heather, caused him to start violently and lay his hand on the pistol in his holster.

Red Rube grinned in his face while he brought the broken-kneed pony alongside of Katerfelto. "Zeems as though a man couldn't forget the tricks of his trade, Captain," said the harbourer, with a cunning leer; "here have I been slotting o' you better nor two mile on end, as though you'd been a right stag with three on the top—that's my calling. There are you, out with the barkers, finger on trigger, stand and deliver!—that's yours."

In vain John Garnet denied and expostulated, protesting, indeed, that he was wholly ignorant of the other's meaning, and did but make an involuntary gesture towards his weapon from an instinct of self-defence. Rube was not so to be put off, and continued his remonstrances in a

tone of confidential sympathy, with his hand on the grey horse's mane.

"There's a time for a deer to move, and a time for a deer to couch," said the harbourer, using the familiar metaphors of his calling. "A time for 'un to stand at bay, and a time for 'un to break the bay. When a deer vinds itself hard pressed, and never a stick of covert for miles, the sensible creatur' takes soil—do 'ee hearken to me, Captain, it takes soil, I say, and vinds its safety many a time in the salt sea. 'Tis not so fur from Porlock to Ilfracombe, but that theer good grey horse could cover the distance in half a day."

He sidled farther off as he spoke, and seemed lost in contemplation of Katerfelto's points and symmetry, as he trotted by his side.

"What should I do at Ilfracombe when I got there?" asked John Garnet; adding impatiently, "Man alive! speak no longer in parables. If you've anything to say, out with it, and tell me what you mean!"

Rube looked behind, before, and on each side; then he drew nearer and whispered—

"There be a price on thic' head o' your'n, Captain, a longish price, too. Maybe more than it be worth."

"I know it," answered John Garnet; "I've seen the bills. It's an easy way to get a hundred guineas, Rube. Why don't you earn the money yourself?"

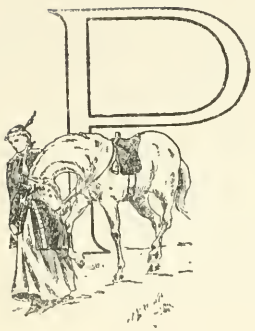
The old man looked hurt. "It's not honest woodcraft," said he. "Every beast of chase has a right to be hunted in season, and with a fair

start. The hounds are on your track, Captain, I give you fair warning; but that's not all. There's one, a coarse black dog" (Rube chuckled while he enunciated this conceit), "as will never be off the line so long as the game is afoot, nor leave the slot till he has the deer by the throat. Do you think you deceived me a while ago, when you two stood in a deadlock together on yonder slab of stone? Double on him, Captain, I do tell 'ee, double on him, that's what *you've* got to do. I've friends at Ilfracombe, free-traders they call 'em down there; they'd take any young man aboard as was well known to Red Rube. This here wind will serve, and I do know 'twill stay in the north for days together now, as though 'twere nailed there. God speed ye, young man. You mind what I tell 'ee. Keep your own counsel, and take a good hold of your horse's head!"

Then he shook the pony's bridle, turned briskly down a coomb, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVI

A HARD BARGAIN



PLODDING wearily on, in the shuffling, dogged, continuous jog-trot that takes a tired hunter home, Cassock presently pricked his ears, and increased the pace of his own accord, while his rider's heart beat fast, for rising an acclivity not a bowshot in front fluttered the blue riding-habit that enclosed her pretty shape, nodded the feather in the saucy little hat that could be worn so jauntily by none but Nelly Carew. Cowslip had failed to make up its lost ground in time for her to see the end of the run, and Nelly was riding soberly home, full of pleasant thoughts and fancies that grouped themselves round a figure on a grey horse, skimming the brown moorland far ahead of all competitors, and when last seen, alone with the hounds!

"Good even, Mistress Nelly," said the Parson, ranging alongside, with an awkward bow. "Nothing amiss, I hope, with Cowslip nor its

rider? 'Tis not often the pair of you give in before the deer, but you must confess that for this once Abner Gale and the old black nag had the better of pretty Mistress Carew." His voice, hoarse and thick with conflicting feelings, startled her from her day-dream. Nelly's colour rose, and the consciousness that he observed it caused her to blush deeper in mingled vexation and shame.

"I made a fatal mistake at starting," said she, with a nervous little laugh and a full stop.

"A great many women do that!" grunted the Parson.

"And all my calculations were wrong," continued Nelly, without noticing the interruption. "If the deer had passed under Dunkerry Beacon, like the big black stag last year, and taken soil in the Barle, down by Landacre Bridge, for instance, or at Withy-pool, where would you all have been then? Your turn to-day, Master Gale; mine to-morrow. That's the rule of stag-hunting, and it seems the same for most things in life."

She spoke with a flurried manner and an affectation of gaiety he did not fail to detect. The Parson's restless eye and moody brow frightened her, and glancing round on the solitude of the moor, she wished herself back with grandfather, safe at home.

"I would it were the same thing in life," he answered sullenly. "A bold, straightforward man who meant fair, and feared nothing, might have a chance of holding his own then, and wouldn't see his place taken by the first newcomer with thicker lace on his coat and more

brass on his forehead. Your park-fed deer is well enough, Mistress Nelly, for them that don't know better, but who in their senses would compare it with a real wild Exmoor stag?"

"I don't understand you!" said the girl, looking in vain for a companion, and wondering what had become of all the defeated riders who must be plodding steadily home.

"Then I'll speak out!" replied the Parson, "and remember, what Abner Gale says, that he sticks to, for good and for evil, mind. *For good and for evil!* I'm a plain man, Mistress Carew."

"Not so very plain, for your age, you know!" Nelly could not resist saying, though dreadfully frightened. But he continued without noticing the interruption—

"A plain man, and maybe I han't learned any of the monkey tricks your town-bred gentlemen bring here into the West, thinking to carry all before them, with a hoist of the eyebrows, a fool's grin, and a dancing-master's bow. But at least I'm honest, if I'm nothing more; not afraid to show my face by light of day, nor to speak my mind in any company, from my Lord Bellinger down to Dick Boss the sheriff's officer, who has got a job in hand that will take him all his time, judging by what I saw to-day."

"Dick Boss! Sheriff's officer!" repeated Nelly, pale and aghast, for already she knew too well John Garnet's danger. "What have I to do with these matters? Why do you say such things to me?"

Though the Parson's voice softened while he answered, in Nelly's ear it sounded harsher than before.

"Why, Mistress Nelly?" he repeated. "I marvel that you can ask me so simple a question. Why do I watch every look of your blue eyes, every word from your sweet lips? Why do I feel a different man in your presence, and hover about you like that moor-buzzard up there hovers over the bare brow of the mountain, wheeling, poising, watching, waiting patiently till he may stoop and carry off his prize?"

"Waiting to tear it in pieces, you mean!" replied Nelly angrily. "You're talking nonsense, Master Gale. If buzzard you be, I at least am not going to become your prey."

The sun was sinking to the brown level of the moor at their backs. The long shadows thrown before them as they rode softly side by side might have belonged to a pair of plighted lovers, so woven together were they, and intermingled on the broad expanse of heather, deepening to a browner russet and a redder gold with every moment of departing day.

Yet in one bosom rankled wild unsatisfied longings, jealousy, suspicion, rage of wounded pride; in the other, contempt, loathing, and a passionate hatred, the more embittered that it was dashed with fear.

"You carry it with a high hand, Mistress Carew," said the Parson, losing the command he had tried to keep over a temper only too apt to rise beyond control. "You might have learned before now 'tis a waste of time to ride the great horse with *me*. I have the power, ay, and more than half the mind, to bring you down from your

saddle there, in that tuft of heather, on your knees. You may smile,—you look parlous handsome when you smile,—but I'm not one to speak out of my turn, I tell ye. I know *everything*, and I've got his life in my hand!"

Of all her fair and noble qualities, a woman's hypocrisy is sometimes the fairest and the noblest. Unlike the rougher sex, it is when she is most unselfish that she seems most artful to deceive. Had her power been equal to her will, Nelly Carew's natural inclination, and indeed her earnest desire, had been to strike this man down, and trample him under Cowslip's hoofs, not perhaps to death, but to bodily injury and degradation, yet she commanded herself with an effort beyond all praise, and smiled sweetly in his face while she observed—

"Something has put you out to-day, Master Gale. I suppose that is why you want to quarrel with your best friends. You never spoke to me so sharp before. Is it Cassock's fault, or mine, or whose, that your good nag could not keep up with that grey horse on the open moor? The creature seemed to have the wings of a bird. If that's all, sure 'tis no disgrace to be beaten when a man does his best."

Though her tone seemed easy and unconstrained, she felt cruelly anxious, and resolved at any cost to learn how far Abner Gale's enmity was to be feared on her lover's behalf.

"The grey horse is a good one, I'll not deny," said the Parson. "Too good for his master and his master's trade, though the beast has saved

the man from hanging many a time and oft. I'm surprised at your grandfather, Mistress Nelly. I'm more surprised at yourself, that you can consort with such a gaol-bird. He is a disgrace to us all, coming here to Porlock as though he could find no better place to hide in from the hue-and-cry."

"Do you mean Master Garnet?" exclaimed Nelly, with flashing eyes, while she stifled a sob of wrath and fear that rose from her heart.

"I mean Galloping Jack, the highwayman," answered Gale,—"a villain who should have swung, by rights, at Tyburn last autumn, whom I devoutly hope to see hanged before the fifth of November next!"

"You showed me his dying speech and confession yourself," answered the girl, with tight-set lips that kept down some overmastering emotion by sheer force of will. "Come, Master Gale, you know as well as I do that John Garnet is no common thief with a black vizard and a speedy horse, no mere moonlight robber to stop a coach for plunder on the king's highway. He has done something worse than that. Out with it; you used to have no secrets from your friends. Tell me what it is!"

Parson Gale was in the habit of declaring that a man who told a lie should possess a good memory. He wished he had stuck more consistently to this maxim, and had not, by his forgetfulness, thus laid his own statement open to denial. The wisest course, he thought, would be to take the bull by the horns.

"I only hoped to shame you out of your fancy, Mistress Nelly," said he, with a transparent affectation of friendliness and sincerity. "I know this man has assumed the title of a famous highwayman for disguise. He is no more Galloping Jack than I am. He is Master John Garnet, *plain* John Garnet, as I have heard them call him, in ridicule, I fancy, of his waiting-maid's face and mop of curling hair. Wanted for robbing His Majesty's Government. Wanted for high treason. Wanted for murder done in Covent Garden, brought home to him by evidence no court of justice can gainsay, and as sure to swing, on one and all of these counts, as I hope I am to get home to supper this blessed night!"

She had grown paler and paler with every accusation in the catalogue of her lover's crimes. She looked as if she must have fallen fainting from the saddle, yet never for an instant did she lose her presence of mind, nor forego her resolution to save John Garnet how she could!

"I can't bring myself to believe it is as bad as you say," she answered carelessly. "But I thought there was something unusual about the gentleman, I'll not deny. 'Tis grandfather who will miss him if he comes to harm. Grandfather took to him, you know, as he never took to a stranger before. You must have seen that yourself."

"And *you*, Mistress Nelly," said the Parson, bringing his weary horse nearer the white pony's side, "did not you take to this stranger too, and

for the sake of a new face flout the old friends who had loved you all your life?"

"La! Master Gale," was the feminine reply, "you talk of loves and likings as though we could put them on and off like our hose and farthingales. Sure you never thought me one to forget an old friend for the sake of a new face, comely though it be?"

"And you do not really care for this bedizened jackanapes?" he exclaimed, while his voice shook with an emotion that betrayed how deeply the admission touched his feelings.

"I love him!" answered Nelly, watching her listener as the steersman watches an angry sky. "Yes, I love him—for grandfather's sake!"

Even in the anxiety and agitation of the moment, even through all the scorn and loathing she felt for the attentions of her unwelcome admirer, it could not but gratify her vanity to mark the changes that passed over his rough, weather-worn face with every word she uttered, every inflection of her voice. She had only suspected the Parson loved her when she first discovered her own love for John Garnet. She was sure of it now, and could almost have found it in her heart to pity him for the utter hopelessness of his suit; but this was no time to indulge in such weakness. Abner Gale's affection was a powerful engine, and she must use it to save John Garnet's life.

Looking very beautiful, and trusting to her beauty as man trusts to his intellect, the brute to its strength and speed, she glanced her blue eyes

shyly in his face, and added, after a becoming little pause of hesitation, "Why, why should all this interest you, Master Gale?"

"Because I love you!" he exclaimed. "Love you, Nelly Carew, more than anything and everything in earth or heaven! I'm old and rough, I know—not fit to black the shoes on your pretty feet. I've been a brawler and a sot, and—and—worse than that, drinking and roystering at feasts and revels, while all the time my heart was sore for the sweetest lass in Devon, to think I wasn't good enough, nor comely enough, so much as to kiss the tips of her fingers, nor to sip with her on the same cup. But I'd be a different man if you were only to hold up your hand. It would be no trouble to leave liquor and wrestling—bouts, fairs, and fiddlings, roaring lads and saucy wenches, at your bidding. Nay, more than that, Mistress Nelly, I could go back from the great oath I swore, if you did but hold up your finger, and forgive my bitterest enemy for your sake!"

"Why should you have enemies, you that are so frank and hearty?" asked Nelly, fairly alarmed at the strength of the feelings she had aroused, while determined to profit by them at any cost.

The Parson reined in his horse, and unconsciously she followed his example.

"The man John Garnet," said he, in a deep, hoarse voice, "took my brother's life—stabbed him in the dark, Mistress Nelly, without friends or witnesses, and that man I have sworn never to leave till with my own eyes I see him laid in a murderer's grave. To-day an accursed chance

delivered him out of my hand, when my knife was almost at his throat. The next time he shall not escape so well. Dick Boss and I, with a few stout lads to help, mean having him safe in Taunton Gaol before the week is out. And this is the gallant, pretty Mistress Nelly, I was fool enough to think had made such way in your good graces as to supplant your old friend Abner Gale!"

How she hated him, sitting there, square and resolute, on his horse! The unwelcome suitor, the implacable enemy, the avenger thirsting for the blood of one whom she only loved more madly, more devotedly, because of his danger and his need! Her blue eyes burned with unaccustomed fire, her cheek glowed with a deep, angry crimson, and Parson Gale, marking her emotion, believed it was called forth by affection for himself!

He looked at her in speechless admiration for the space of a full minute, then he burst out with a sob—

"Have pity on me, Mistress Nelly,—have pity on me! I love you so! I love you so!"

She had reviewed the whole position, taken in every detail of the situation during this eventful pause, and made her crowning manœuvre with the skill of that subtlest of all tacticians—a woman at her wit's end!

"It's very easy to talk!" she observed demurely, "but I was always one that liked to see a man prove his words. If you—you *really* cared for me, you would do what I ask, wouldn't

you, Master Gale, and never want to know the reason why?"

"Ask it!" exclaimed the Parson, "and if I say no, beautiful Mistress Nelly, then say no to *me* when I plead for something dearer and more precious than the light of day and the very air I breathe!"

She knew too well the compact implied by so enthusiastic an assent, but hesitated not for a single instant.

"You will spare Master Garnet," she said in a steady, monotonous voice, "and give him time to get clear out of the country, for my—my grandfather's sake."

"On one condition!"

"On *any* condition," she murmured, and the brown moors, the evening sky, seemed to spin round so fast that she turned faint and giddy in the whirl.

There was no question of deception, no loop-hole for mental reservation and eventual escape. In the balance hung her lover's safety against her own utter destruction. Could there be a doubt into which scale would be flung the deciding weight of a woman's self-sacrificing devotion, a woman's uncalculating love?

"You will be my wife, Mistress Nelly Carew, if I pledge myself to let this man go free?" said the Parson, in slow, distinct syllables, while a grin of triumph, none the less hateful for the affection it expressed, rendered his face more hideous than ever in her eyes.

"I will be your wife, Master Abner Gale, if

you pledge yourself to let this man go free!" she repeated, in clear, incisive tones that seemed the echo of his own.

"And you promise never to speak to him nor see him again?"

"And I promise never to see him nor speak to him again!"

"It's a bargain."

"It's a bargain."

Then they shook hands, and although Abner Gale would fain have ratified this strange betrothal with a kiss, there was something in Nelly's face that absolutely cowed him, and he forbore.

They soon separated where their respective paths diverged. The Parson made his way over the moor wondering that he did not feel more elated with his triumph, while Nelly rode home alone, looking into vacancy with a white face and fixed, tearless eyes, that seemed to express neither sorrow nor impatience nor fear, but only mute wonder, and an uncomplaining, apathetic despair.

CHAPTER XXVII

SELF-SACRIFICE

"WEATHER-WISE—fool otherwise," is a West-country proverb that by no means applied to Red Rube. The harbourer, who had taken a judicious view of John Garnet's position, and gave him sensible advice under the circumstances, proved also a reliable prophet, even in so uncertain a prediction as the quarter from which the wind would blow. It remained, as he expected, in the north, and a keen frost setting in on the night of the great chase from Cloutsham Ball gave promise of an earlier winter than was either expected or desired in the fertile coombs of West Somerset and North Devon. The honest yeomen-farmers looked grave and shook their heads. There were apples yet ungathered in late orchards, oats standing in sheaves on bare hill-farms; the cold weather would bring the stags on, too, and put an end to their favourite sport. Nobody wanted to begin winter in October, while old people dreaded the effects of an unseasonably low temperature on neighbours who were a few years, or even a few months, older than themselves.

"It's a bargain."

More than one venerable inhabitant of Porlock, noting his shrunken form and feeble gait, was heard to express a fear that, with the close of autumn, it would "go hard with Master Carew"; and the veteran himself, though he kept his opinion from Nelly, little hoped to see the buds and blossoms of another spring. He felt that Death was coming like a giant on the mountains, casting his shadow before him as he advanced with swift and noiseless strides, nor, but for the leaving of his grandchild, did it seem so hard to follow the host of friends and comrades who had preceded him to the unknown country beyond the deep, dark, narrow stream. A brave man is seldom deceived in such matters. Old Carew, taking to his bed, gaunt and weary, an hour before Nelly came home, knew he would never leave it again alive.

Guiding Cowslip deftly down the hill into Porlock, the girl believed her cup of misery was full. She told herself it could not hold another drop. Severed from the love of her life at a single blow, dealt by her own hand—bound to the man she loathed and feared and hated, by her own promise — pledged never to see nor speak to John Garnet again—forbidden even to warn him that he must fly! No! Honour or dishonour, she would *not* hold to this part of the contract! He must learn the truth from her own lips, and then, though he should heap curses on her perfidy, she would bid him farewell for ever, and live out, as best she might, the life of misery and desolation she had chosen for his sake!

It formed no part of her calculations that he should be waiting for her at her own door, that, lighting down from her pony in the dusk of evening, she should leap into his arms, and find herself folded in a close embrace against his heart.

"Oh! you mustn't! you mustn't!" was all Nelly had strength to say, for one happy moment, ere she released herself and stood apart, trembling in every limb. Then, even in the failing light, she observed that his face was very grave, and she missed the gay, careless ring in his tone, that possessed so strange a charm for her loving ear. She had never heard him speak so sadly before.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, "my own Nelly, I looked for you all the way home, and waited here till you came back, because I had something to say that it was right you should hear to-night. I have not the heart to say it now. I was going away to-morrow morning, only for a time, Nelly, but I cannot leave you in your distress. I must stay and help you to keep up your courage, dear heart, and to take care of grandfather. He is ill —very ill, I fear, my pretty lass, and asked for you before he went to lie down; but try not to be frightened, dear heart, if—if—he doesn't seem to know you at first, when you go to his bedside!"

With a little cry of pity and terror she bounded from him while he spoke, and sped like a lapwing to her grandfather's chamber, leaving John Garnet standing by the porch, with Cowslip's

bridle on his arm, in the last stage of perplexity and distress.

Leading the pony to the stable, he felt utterly at a loss what to do.

Courageous as he was, and too reckless of his own safety, he could not but feel that his position here in the hiding-place he had chosen became more dangerous every hour. Red Rube's warning did but corroborate his own suspicions, and when he reflected on Parson Gale's unscrupulous hatred, which would leave no stone unturned to deliver him into the hangman's hands, his common sense told him there was but one chance of escape left, while the plan advised by the harbourer of taking boat at Ilfracombe seemed the only practicable means of flight.

So soon, therefore, the next day, as Katerfelto was recovered from the effects of his exertions, he had intended to make for that little seaport, and embark forthwith, sending the grey horse back to Porlock by a trusty hand, to remain in Mistress Carew's care till its owner's return. He promised himself one more interview with Nelly, when, for the fiftieth time, they might exchange vows of unalterable affection, and so would go his way, despondent indeed and unhappy, yet not wholly despairing of better days to come.

And now old Carew's dangerous illness, of which he was advised the moment he got off his horse, scattered all these projects to the winds. While he waited for Nelly's return, that he might prepare her to expect the worst, he resolved that no consideration of safety for himself should part

him from the woman he loved so long as his presence could cheer and console her grief.

After a restless night, and an early visit to Katerfelto's stable, where it was satisfactory to find the grey horse fresh and lively, rested from his hard day, John Garnet presented himself at Carew's door, and was surprised to be received by Nelly herself, who had not been to bed, yet looked none the less beautiful for the pale face and weary eyes, that spoke of some trial even sorer and sadder than the watch in a sick-chamber, than the cruel suspense of hope and fear, when life seems to hang on a thread that wears itself slowly away.

He would have caught her in his arms, but she motioned him to keep back with a scared, wistful look, and a ghastly smile that chilled him to the heart.

"He is conscious," she said. "I thought you would wish to know. There is yet a hope, and God is merciful. Surely I am not to lose all in one day at one blow!"

"He will get well, sweetheart," answered John Garnet hopefully, "and live, I pray, for many a long year to come. In a few weeks he will be strong enough to leave his bed, and, Nelly, he will be able to give me the girl I love with his own hand."

The last sentence he whispered in her ear, but she started away from him, and her face, pale enough before, turned white to the very lips.

"Silence!" she exclaimed fiercely. "You must never speak to me like that again!"

But for the pity of it, his blank amazement would have seemed absolutely ludicrous. It was as though some soft and gentle bird that he loved and cherished had turned on him with the gaping beak and battling wings of an infuriated hawk!

"What mean you?" he gasped. "What is it? Nelly! Sweetheart! What have I done?"

"To save him from death! To save him from death!" The words seemed ringing in her brain, or she never could have nerved herself for the task she had undertaken.

"We have not gone too far to draw back, Master Garnet," she said. "There is a time for all things. Let there be no more fooling between you and me!"

She spoke lightly, even flippantly, though she felt her heart breaking. Surely there is no courage like that of a woman who makes up her mind to lead a forlorn hope.

"Fooling!" he repeated; "fooling! Do you mean to affirm that you have been *fooling* me all the time? Explain yourself, Mistress Carew. Have you found a new sweetheart, or is this but a sorry jest to try the temper of the old?"

She bowed her head in assent. If she made him angry, she thought it would be easier to effect a rupture. And yet, to part from him unkindly! ah! if she could but fall down then and there, tell him the truth, and die!

He felt utterly perplexed, astounded, incredulous, yet wounded to the very heart. It seemed so impossible she should have ceased to care for

him, even while the announcement was on her very lips. Stiffly, and with an offended air, extremely unlike the frank and kindly bearing that was one of John Garnet's characteristics, he made a low bow, and observed quietly—

"No lady need fear persecution from me. Forgive my repeating to you, Mistress Carew, that I loved you dearly and believed you cared for me in return."

"I know it," she said, and but for a choking sensation in her throat would have added something more.

"I have deceived myself strangely, it seems," he continued, trying to meet her eyes, which she kept averted from his face. "Nevertheless, I think I am entitled to demand the cause of this sudden dismissal. I should not like to lose my respect for you, Mistress Carew, even though I must try to forget my own unreasonable love."

Still that catching in the throat. She loosened the black velvet band round her neck before she could answer.

"Master Garnet," she said, "it is not good for you to be here. You ought never to have come. I blame myself you have not sooner gone away. Believe me, the air of Porlock means death. If you—you ever cared for me, as you say, depart at once, to-day, this very hour, and put the blue sea between us, for my sake!"

"For *your* sake?" This was surely a new experience of the sex, thought John Garnet; was ever woman so incomprehensible? Was ever woman so lovely and so beloved?

"For my sake," she repeated, and the blue eyes met his own without flinching. "Master Garnet, I am going to be married, and your presence here conduces neither to my happiness nor your own."

"Married? Tell me at least the name of the man you have chosen."

There was no bitterness in his tone. Only a deep sorrow and a kindly interest that told of unselfish affection, wounded but not destroyed.

"Parson Gale," she answered, speaking very fast and glancing wildly about her. "Does it surprise you? Is it strange? Does it not seem like a jest?" She burst into a painful laugh, shrill, harsh, and by no means suggestive of mirth. He looked anxiously in her face, wondering more and more.

"Mistress Carew," he said, in a grave, earnest voice, "I pray you may be happy!" and offered his hand.

She caught it in both her own, with a low, sobbing cry, pressed it to her heart, her lips, her eyes, now streaming with tears, flung it from her in hysteric violence, and rushed out of his presence, leaving John Garnet utterly bewildered and dismayed.

Even now he could not bring himself to admit that all was over between them, though wholly unable to account for his sweetheart's inexplicable conduct, and completely at a loss what to think and what to believe.

Later in the day, wandering restlessly to and fro, unwilling to leave its vicinity, he observed

Parson Gale ride through the village of Porlock, dismount at old Carew's door, tie his horse there by the bridle, and enter the house without further ceremony. Then, for the first time in his life, he felt that keen pang of jealousy which is at once the test and the punishment of love.

The Parson, notwithstanding certain misgivings, smothered in his own breast, that his wooing, although successful, was attended by many hindrances and drawbacks, had attired himself, as became his new character, with unusual care and splendour. The rusty old riding-suit was replaced by a glossy black coat and waistcoat. His boots were clean, his spurs bright, and a new steel buckle shone in the band of his hat. More than one acquaintance whom he met in his ride grinned admiringly, and asked himself, in his own vernacular, "Wot the dickens Pa'yson wur up to now?"

But Abner Gale, like the rest of mankind, was doomed to learn that, in a love-chase, as in a stag-hunt, checks, disappointments, falls, and other casualties must be encountered and endured. He had bought his pearl at a great price, no less than the loss of his revenge, and it seemed there should be nothing to do now but to stretch out his hand and place the jewel in his breast. He felt sore and angry, like a man defrauded of his rights, or overreached in a bargain, to find himself kept waiting nearly an hour in old Carew's parlour, and greeted at last by Nelly, with a pale, serious face, and eyes full of tears.

He was a brisk suitor enough, to do him

justice, entertaining no very exalted notions of women's coyness and delicacy, but holding rather to certain old-fashioned maxims inculcating promptitude and decision, protesting that "faint heart never won fair lady," and always impatient to "strike while the iron was hot." Yet even Parson Gale felt abashed to meet that serious, heart-broken gaze, and he could no more have offered to kiss her cheek than if she had been a queen on the throne.

Coldly, quietly, as though there were nothing more between them than the intercourse of common acquaintance, she informed him of her grandfather's illness, and her own fears for its result, adding that he required constant attendance; and Master Gale must not think her uncivil or inhospitable if she could spare him only a few minutes of her company in this climax of sorrow and distress.

Perhaps she never thought so well of him as when he released her hand with that respect which real misery commands from the roughest of natures, while he bade her, in a tone of unfeigned sympathy, "Keep her heart up, and never say die; for while there's life there's hope!"

"Not for me, Master Gale!" answered poor Nelly, now breaking down completely. "Oh, grandfather, grandfather! I had but you in the world!" Then she hid her face in her hands, and he saw by the action of her shoulders that she was sobbing as if her heart would break. He dashed a tear from his own rough cheek.

"I'll take my leave now, Mistress Nelly," said he, "only wishing I could be of service to you or do you good. Is there *nothing* you can think of? I'd go fasting and barefoot from here to—to Jerusalem!" declared the Parson, who had not an idea where it was, "if I thought I could take the weight of a feather off the burden you have to bear!"

She only waved him away with one hand, keeping her tear-stained face buried in the other. He had already reached the door, when a bright thought suggested itself, and he turned back.

"Mistress Nelly!" he exclaimed, "if there's a doctor in England can cure good Master Carew, I know where he is to be found. I'll wager a gallon I bring him to this house within four hours of the present time." The familiar expression denoted that Parson Gale was thoroughly in earnest.

Nelly looked up through her tears. "God bless you for your kindness, at anyrate," she sobbed. "What is he? Who is he? Send for him at once!"

He turned, with his hand on the door. "The man is in hiding," he answered, "and may be afraid to come, for there is a price on his head. But this is a case of life and death, and if he refuses I'll tie him hand and foot, by George! bundle him on to a horse, and carry him with me at a gallop across the moor!"

With this valorous promise, Abner Gale swung himself into the saddle, and in a few seconds was clattering up the stony lane from Porlock at his

utmost speed. Regardless of his new clothes and the lustre of his boots, he pursued his way at the same headlong pace, through deep coombs and shallow streams, miry swamps and tufted banks of heather, till he gained the open moor, and only drew bridle when he reached that lone and sequestered valley in which the gipsies had pitched their camp. Through it he rode like a madman, scattering the swarthy little half-naked children to right and left beneath his horse's feet. At the door of a brown weather-stained tent sat Fin Cooper mending a kettle, and here the Parson halted with a jerk.

"Where's the priest?" said he. "I want him this instant. 'Tis to save a man's life!"

"What priest?" asked Fin, looking lazily up from his work.

"Katerfelto," explained Gale.

"Katerfelto," repeated the gipsy. "He would not thank you for calling him by his name!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

SELF-DEFENCE

HE did *not* thank him. The charlatan, who had closely shaven his venerable beard, and adopted, with their reserved demeanour, the precise and sombre habit of the Jesuits, was sitting down to an excellent stew, whereof the savour, notwithstanding his preoccupation, rose gratefully to the Parson's nostrils. But his business admitted of no delay, even for such temptation as a mess of game and venison cooked gipsy-fashion; and, laying his heavy hand on the other's shoulder, he addressed him by name, bidding him shortly "rise and get to the saddle, since a patient was dying for want of him. And even to those who knew it best, 'twas a sorry pastime riding the moor in the dark!"

Katerfelto started, looking about uneasily for Dick Boss and his satellites. "Hush! good Master Gale," said he; "a man may have more names than one, and I am known as Father Constant here. The person you speak of fled the country a week ago. You owe him some gratitude, or I am mistaken. 'Twould be

a scurvy trick to lay the bloodhounds on his track."

"Never fear, man!" answered the Parson heartily. "Safe and undisturbed as a November stag shalt thou remain, so long as thou harbourest with us. 'Tis but a cast of thy trade I am asking thee, as though I bade Fin Cooper do me a bit of tinkering on a wornout kettle. We must have thee down at Porlock to stop a hole in a man's life. Fin is putting a saddle on the sure-footed roan even now. I take no denial, Master Katerfelto. If you come not of goodwill, I shall carry you thither by force."

"Needs must when the devil drives," answered the other; "and the proverb seems to hold good with a West-country parson. But, I pray you, let us ride softly and fairly. Lancets and scalpels are none the better for shaking, and I had as lief be hanged by King George as break my neck in a Devonshire bog!"

Nervous of temperament, loving his ease, and unaccustomed to the saddle, there yet lurked in Katerfelto that professional instinct which seems to pervade every disciple of the healing science. He left his dinner unfinished for a scamper over the moor, regretful indeed, yet with admirable promptitude in the hope of saving a fellow-creature's life. He had practised medicine and surgery before he took to conspiracy and imposition; entertained sufficient confidence in his own skill, believing it greater than it was; and, but for the Parson's reckless speed and the rough nature of the ground they traversed, would

have experienced a doctor's gratification in the excitement of a new case, and the exercise of his art. But that rushing, reckless, headlong ride put to flight all thoughts save those of immediate self-preservation. Fin Cooper's roan, no matter how he came by it, was a swift and sure-footed Galloway, with a hard mouth and a determined will of its own. The Parson had no sooner mounted than he urged his horse to a gallop, and proceeded at that pace up and down the steepest hills, along the most broken paths, over the roughest ground, and through the tallest heather without pause or hesitation; while the Galloway, not to be outdone, followed close in its leader's track, now leaping a hidden ditch, now swerving sharply aside to avoid a ravine, anon plunging through a bog up to its girths, with snorts of emulation and defiance. Finally, when the Parson came to an abrupt halt in the gloom of Horner Woods, it bumped against his horse's quarters with a jerk that fairly shot Katerfelto out of the saddle on its neck and ears.

"I pray you give me a moment's breathing space," urged the discomfited rider as he shuffled back into his seat, "else, I warn you, Master Gale, you will bring the dead to heal the living when we arrive at our patient's door!"

"Where there's life there's hope," answered the Parson, who in his abstraction regarded his companion's distress no more than the difficulties in their way. "We are close at hand now. I can hear the tide whispering in the bay. Oh,

Master Katerfelto, rescue me this one man from the grasp of death, and ask Abner Gale what you will in return! I am not so bad as you think, and—and—bad as I am, I never went back from my word!"

"I'll do my best," promised the other, observing, with exceeding gratification, that their horses' hoofs now rang on a sound, hard road, and that the scanty lights which marked the village of Porlock were within a quarter of a mile.

Dismounting at old Carew's door, the Parson ushered Katerfelto into Nelly's presence, and while he felt reassured to learn that her grandfather was still alive, could not but mark with deep concern the ravages a few hours of distress and vexation had made on the sweet face of his promised wife. He seemed, however, to recognise one consolation in the midst of all his troubles and anxieties—John Garnet must be far enough off by this time, and there was nothing more to fear from the rival whose absence he had purchased at the price of his own revenge. In his self-satisfaction the Parson almost fancied himself a benevolent and forgiving man, with virtues only now coming to maturity, who deserved to be happy because he was good.

Establishing the doctor in Carew's house, under his granddaughter's care, Abner Gale had the grace to take his own departure without delay, and rode home through the dark, elated at the successful issue of his enterprise, and the

matrimonial prospects opening before him, but unmoved by Nelly's wan looks and obvious misery as by the north wind that blew so keen at his back in angry gusts, powdering the sleeves of his riding-coat with something whiter than sleet, something that a month later in the year he would have called snow.

"She never could live a week in that old house," muttered the Parson, turning his collar up to his ears, "unprotected and alone. She would come home to Abner Gale's roof, for sure, as kind and willing as a bird to the nest. It won't be long first, my beauty, for, if this is to be winter in earnest, the cold will bring the old man down like an apple off a tree!"

And the Parson was right. Carew's life was indeed ebbing swiftly and surely away; yet much had to come and go, even at this quiet village of Porlock, before his shattered storm-worn barque could reach her peaceful moorings in that Fair Haven—"where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."

Katerfelto did his duty, and Nelly scarcely left the patient's bedside for a minute at a time. If skill and attention could have saved him, old Carew might have been kept alive for many a week to come; but the last few grains in the hour-glass seem to dribble away the fastest, and it was no more obvious to the doctor who watched, than to the girl who prayed, that, with sinking strength and failing vitality, the question was no longer of days, but of hours.

In this her sore distress, how could John

Garnet find it in his heart to leave the neighbourhood of the woman he loved? How could he bear to think of her loneliness, protected only by the hateful attentions of Parson Gale? He lingered on imprudently enough, visiting the house at frequent intervals for news of the dying man, and pressing many a crown-piece on the sorrowful servant, who was the only person visible to answer his inquiries.

Yet his pale and anxious looks had been marked by loving eyes, swimming in tears because of his constancy, his danger, and the promise that forbade further warning or expostulation. Herself unseen, Nelly caught a glimpse of her lover more than once—and so did Katerfelto.

His presence filled the charlatan with indignation and alarm. They had been concerned together in a conspiracy against the Government, and either of them, so argued Katerfelto, could hang the other. If John Garnet recognised him, it was more than probable that he would endeavour to secure his own safety, or at least a commutation of capital punishment, by informing against his confederate.

The grey horse, the arms, the money, all would be traced back to the master-spirit that originated the plot, and there would be no escape for him then! John Garnet must be destroyed at once, without scruple and without delay. The means were close at hand. The Parson made no secret of his attachment to Nelly Carew, and Katerfelto seemed to know by instinct that in

such a character as Gale's, jealousy once aroused could be lulled by nothing short of a deadly and final revenge. After all, he did but act in self-defence! He owed John Garnet a grudge, perhaps, for the abduction of Waif; but it was no question of petty injuries or reprisals now. Simply a choice of evils. John Garnet or himself had to pay the penalty of high treason at Tyburn. Of course, it must be John Garnet!

So, when Parson Gale rode down to Porlock on his daily visit of inquiry, the charlatan motioned him into the little parlour, and closed the door on their conference, with a mysterious face.

"My business here," he began, in his dry, sarcastic tone, "lies with symptoms rather than affections, and concerns the liver more than the heart. Nevertheless, I can understand men's devices, though I cannot sympathise with their follies, and I see well enough, Master Gale, there is no price you would grudge to pay for a pair of blue eyes that are sore with weeping and watching in the chamber overhead."

"What of that?" asked the other abruptly; for Nelly's persistent avoidance of him on the plea of her grandfather's danger vexed him to the heart.

"Not much, in my opinion," answered Katerfelto; "but it may be something in yours. The same cause produces different effects. You carry a pebble in your pocket without inconvenience, but put it in your shoe and I defy

you to walk across the room. You love this girl, Master Gale, and I know it. Do you want to lose her?"

The Parson must have been very much in earnest, for he neither stormed nor swore, but only turned a shade paler, and said, in a low, thick voice, "Lose her!—I had rather lose my own soul!"

"Then look a little closer after her," was the reply. "There's another man within a stone's-throw who loves blue eyes, maybe as well as you do. He comes to the house daily. Ay, half a dozen times a day!"

"What manner of man?" asked the Parson, still in the same low, concentrated voice.

"A straight, handsome young spark," answered Katerfelto, "with bright eyes and dark clustering hair. Tush, Master Gale, you know him well enough — 'tis none other than my former patient, plain John Garnet!"

"When was he here last?"

"To-day—not an hour ago—a few minutes before you arrived. Stay, Master Gale—you seem in a prodigious hurry to be gone. See! you have forgotten your riding-glove."

"Give it Master Garnet when next he comes," said the Parson, in no louder tones than before, but with a look in his eyes that made even Katerfelto's blood run cold, "and tell him from me the harbourer shall not claim his right next time I set my stag up to bay. He will know what I mean. Oh, Nelly, Nelly!" he murmured, with a sob, while he unhitched his bridle from

the garden palings, "I would have kept to my bargain if you had kept to yours!"

The charlatan, returning to his medical duties perfectly satisfied that his object was in course of accomplishment, observed that Nelly was not as usual in attendance on her grandfather. She entered the room, however, within a minute or two, so pale and calm that he had not the least suspicion she could have overheard any part of his conversation with the Parson.

Nevertheless, that evening, John Garnet found on his supper-table a letter, the first he had ever received from her, bearing no signature, and consisting only of the following lines:—

"They have resolved on your destruction. Fly at once. Perhaps hereafter I shall see you again. Think no more of what I said. I will never marry him. I had rather die first."

That was all, but it set John Garnet acting as well as thinking. His preparations were soon made, a small valise was packed, his arms were carefully examined and fresh primed, finally he visited his horse in the stable, saw to his corn, his shoes, his saddle and bridle, all the requirements indispensable for the morrow, when, with the first appearance of day, he would have to ride for his life.

Lastly, he passed once more under Nelly's windows, and watched, with a strange, sad longing, the point of light that denoted her vigil by the dying man's bed. Then he turned back to his lodging for a few hours' rest, more

depressed and sick at heart than he had ever felt before. The north wind howled angrily, stripping their autumn leaves in scores from the bending boughs of the orchard, while every now and then an ungathered apple came to the ground with a thud. It was a dreary night, pain and sorrow within, cold and desolation without. A hopeless mourner above, a weary watcher below, for something told John Garnet that old Carew's life was ebbing away with every passing minute, and that death was busy up yonder, while here the snow fell thick and fast.

CHAPTER XXIX

REMORSE

IN the gipsies' camp a night of snow and storm was accepted without a murmur, and provided against in a spirit of ingenuity and forethought peculiar to such wayfarers as love the shelter of no roof so well as the canopy of heaven. Fin Cooper in his tent, at the door of which crackled a liberal fire of roots and brushwood, filling the interior with warmth, and indeed smoke, declared himself as happy as a king! He had all his comforts about him, and most of his possessions within call, nor wanted a sufficient share of such superfluities as made the luxuries of his hard unsophisticated life. There was a dressed skin for his couch, a good blanket for his coverlet, and a soft shawl doubled over an anker of brandy for his pillow. In the kettle steamed a hare, a brace of partridges, and a hanch from the forequarter of a red deer. With food, rest, and warmth, good liquor in his cup and good tobacco in his pipe, Fin could not but admit that, so long as his tent held waterproof, he was not much to be pitied, even on a Devonshire moor under an early fall of snow. To-night, also, he considered

himself more fortunate than usual, as he shared these advantages with no less welcome a visitor than Waif, accompanied, for reasons of propriety, by her grandmother, an old Egyptian, reputed to have once been handsome and of fascinating demeanour; now, to say the least, a remarkable person in appearance, grim, taciturn, given to drink, and seldom condescending to remove a short black pipe from her mouth.

His promised wife, on the contrary, seemed in high spirits, as she was unquestionably in great beauty. Her black eyes flashed and sparkled, her tawny cheek glowed with a rich, deep crimson, while her manner betrayed no little self-assertion, her tone something amounting almost to defiance when addressed by her future lord. Talkative she never had been from childhood, but to-night she was less taciturn than usual, and seemed strangely eager to break such occasional silence as gave scope for her own thoughts.

Fin, looking on her with admiring eyes, did not fail to notice that in figure she had grown thin to leanness, and that there shone a brilliancy, unnatural even for a gipsy, in the uneasy glances that watched his movements so narrowly, yet never rested for an instant on his face.

Thyra always seemed unlike other girls, thought Fin, and this preoccupation, no doubt, was but the shyness of love.

He took her hand, while the old beldame was busy refilling her pipe, and raised the slender, shapely fingers to his lips, with a comely grace

that a gipsy wears no less naturally than a prince of the blood.

"To-morrow, Thyra," said he, "you will make Fin Cooper the happiest man alive. To-morrow we shall be one in the sight of all our people, never to part again. The Parson of the Gorgios joins a couple by the hand, like a brace of thieves chained together in the dock, but the Romipen of the Romany, a true gipsy marriage, solders them heart to heart, as I would weld tin and copper into brass! To-morrow, my lass, you will be mine. To-night I am altogether yours. Ask me what you will, beautiful Thyra, I can deny you nothing at such a time as this!"

Her hand remained in his while he spoke; when he dropped it she shivered from head to foot.

"I am cold," she murmured, "so cold. There will be snow to-morrow, Fin, deep snow, amongst these hills. The Gorgio bride wears white on her marriage day. A Romany lass might do worse than follow the example."

Her fixed gaze, that seemed looking on some object miles and miles away, her sorrowful tone, so quiet and so very weary, disturbed him. He caught her hand once more, and would have drawn her into his arms but for the shake and snort of a horse at the tent-door, and Parson Gale's well-known voice bidding him rouse and show himself with a tass of brandy in his hand.

A man who has little to offer is usually very hospitable. Fin sprang forward to welcome the intruder with cordial alacrity, and summoned a

bare-legged urchin from half a score within call to lead the Parson's horse into a sheltered nook behind the adjoining copse, where two or three donkeys were pulling at a truss of hay. Abner Gale was then hurried into the tent, and supplied with brandy; the inclemency of the weather rendering that liquor unusually grateful to his burly frame.

"All friends, here?" asked the Parson, holding the untasted cup in his hand.

"All friends," replied Fin Cooper. "The old woman is stone deaf, and this time to-morrow Thyra will be my wife!"

Gale was equal to the occasion. Ere Waif could turn her head he imprinted a kiss on her cheek, and tossed off the brandy to her health.

"I claim my priest's dues," said he gallantly,—"the first right to salute a bride. And now to business, Fin. Not a moment is to be lost. I want to borrow the sure-footed roan again to-night. I'll pay you handsome this time."

With the lofty politeness of men who deal in horses honestly or otherwise, Fin ignored the question of money altogether.

"Oh, that's nothing between me and you!" said the gipsy; "but the last journey you went, our roan might as well have been stag-hunting. You must have galloped him a dozen miles on end without drawing bridle. 'Tis a good little beast as was ever bred on the moor, but I needn't tell *you*, Parson, that horseflesh is not iron. What do you want with him now?"

"To mount Dick Boss," was the answer.

Fin made a wry face, and Waif held her breath. A sheriff's officer seemed the last person to whom it was natural for a gipsy to lend his horse.

Parson Gale put his head out at the tent-door, looked about him into the dark night through which snowflakes were falling thick ; and, having satisfied himself he could not be overheard, proceeded to unfold his plans, the more frankly that he had every reason to count on the assistance of both his listeners.

"There's money to be got by the job," said he, with an evil scowl on his heavy brows. "Blood-money, but what of that? We will share and share alike. This pretty lass of yours, Fin, she found out where the deer harboured. You and Dick Boss, and another handy chap or two, shall help me to take him, and when King George comes down with the reward—God bless him!—there will be twenty guineas each to spend in drink! If that won't make a blithe wedding, Fin Cooper, I'll engage to remain a bachelor till my dying day!"

The gipsy was a man of business. "And *your* share, Parson?" he asked, calculating the sum to be divided with great exactitude.

"I don't desire to be paid," replied the Parson. "I do it for the sport!"

Waif leaped from her seat, with flashing eyes, and her hand on the knife she always wore, but sank back laughing wildly, and speaking in short disjointed gasps.

"Good!" she said. "Good! He's the right

sort, Fin, this Gorgio. Bid him tell us how he means to set about the job."

Fin Cooper, turning to the Parson, thought he had never seen so wicked a smile as that which gleamed in Gale's eyes and curled round his mouth while he repeated, "I do it for the sport, lad; he's a right deer, I tell ye; and if I don't set him up to-morrow, I swear I'll never go hunting again."

"That's why you want the roan?" asked Fin, turning the matter over in his mind, as a question of profit and loss.

"Right," answered the Parson; "Dick Boss must be on a good nag, and so must I. If John Garnet should get the wind of us, he'll show a clean pair of heels, you may take your oath. But what of that? Let worst come to worst, four mounted men spreading wide, and knowing every yard of the ground, ought to ride him down, though the grey horse had a wing at each foot instead of an iron shoe. But that's not my plan. Harkye, Fin, we'll be in the saddle before daybreak, and we'll take him while's he's asleep."

Waif stirred uneasily, but only muttered again, "Good! good! Mind what he says, Fin, for surely the Gorgio speaks fair."

"'Tis as easy as drinking out of a glass," continued the Parson, scarce noticing her interruption. "Dick Boss and the roan, his two men riding their own nags, yourself, Fin, on something that can gallop a bit—I never knew you without one—and game old Cassock to bring me along with the best of ye. It would be a rare chase,

lad—I could almost wish he might slip through our fingers and ride for it over the moor, but he'll never have the chance, Fin ; he'll never have the chance ! "

" Suppose he shows fight, Parson ? " suggested the gipsy, who was a bold fellow enough on occasion, but regarded such matters with a keen eye to business. " 'Tis none of your dunghill fowls this, but a cock of the game, with never a morsel of white in his wing, put him down where you will. Suppose he lugs out on Dick Boss, and whistles a brace of balls into you and me ? "

" I'm not afraid of him," answered Gale ; " it makes no difference in the reward, Fin, whether we take him dead or alive."

" Come back, Thyra ! " exclaimed the gipsy, with more of a husband's authority than was yet permissible in his tone. " Where are you going, lass ? Come back, I tell ye."

She was already through the tent-door, but returned at his bidding. " It's stifling hot in here, Fin," she said ; " I should have choked but for that mouthful of fresh air."

" And you were so cold a while ago," he replied, watching her narrowly. " Parson Gale," he added, turning to his visitor, " take the roan, and welcome. The lad will show you where to find him. I'll meet you at the head of the coomb an hour before daybreak. It's a job that won't work well in the dark ; but the less time we put off the better when once the sun's up. Will you take another cup of brandy, Parson ? you've a

cold ride before you, and we've not done with the snow yet."

But Gale declined, and Waif, who suffered nothing to escape her notice, argued from this unusual abstinence an intense longing to work out the project of his revenge.

So John Garnet was to be in the power of his enemies, bound hand and foot, delivered over to a shameful death, with to-morrow's dawn, and it wanted but three hours of daylight now. John Garnet, with his merry eyes, his winning smile, and frank, kindly face. Was this to be the end of all? The nightcap, and the nosegay, and the hangman's cart rumbling over the stones on Tyburn Hill. John Garnet, the man she used to love so dearly that she would have followed him barefooted through the world. And it was *her* doing—*her* revenge. Yes! If she had driven a knife into his throat she could not more surely have slain him, than when she betrayed the secret of his hiding-place, and denounced him to Parson Gale. The man she used to love, the man she loved so fondly, so madly still. Now that it was too late, the whole tide of her feelings seemed to turn, and she would have given her own life freely, then and there, to save him, ay, even for the blue-eyed girl, whom from the moment she saw them whispering together in the orchard she hated, with the fierce, pitiless hatred of her race.

She gasped for breath; the tent and its occupants swam before her eyes; a deadly faintness seemed to hang fetters of ice about her limbs, and she turned sick with a maddening fear

lest the strength and hardihood she had so prized might fail her in this the extremity of her need.

Fin Cooper watched her with shrewd suspicious glances. The gipsy, a man of few words, but keen in perception and ready of resource, drew his own conclusions from the restlessness he could not fail to notice in his promised wife, and resolved not to let her out of his sight till he started on horseback to join Parson Gale and his satellites. Once in the saddle, he had no fear that Waif could outstrip them, or give John Garnet warning of his danger till he was safe in their hands.

So he sat and smoked in silence, stretching his legs across his own tent-door, while Waif gnawed her lip in an agony of remorse within, and the snow fell fast through the darkness without. But towards dawn the air turned colder and the sky began to clear. Fin Cooper rose, shook himself, drank a mouthful of brandy, and bestowing a sarcastic nod on its inmates, left the tent to saddle his horse and depart. In a moment the girl slipped out behind him, and, lightly clad as she was, sped through the sleeping encampment, swift and noiseless as a deer. Her grandmother, waking from a doze, never doubted but that Thyra had returned to her own tent, and unwilling to face the night air, composed herself to sleep again with the pipe still in her mouth. Fin Cooper, riding steadily up the coomb, chuckled to think how he had outwitted his bride, and stifled the pangs of jealousy it seemed so un-

reasonable to entertain, now that the lapse of an hour or two must deliver his rival into his hand, while the swarm of gipsies he left behind him, huddled up in their blankets under their canvas coverings, snored healthily and loud, thinking little, and caring less, about the pearl of their tribe, her anguish, her sorrows, her coming espousals, or, indeed, anything but their own warmth, comfort, and repose.

So Waif sped on, fast as her supple limbs could carry her, through the copse, and up the coomb, and across the moor, wrapped in its cheerless shroud, stretching, as it seemed in her impatience, to a limitless expanse that mortal foot could never compass, mortal eye was powerless to scan. Oh for the wings of the curlew! Oh for the speed of the red deer! She would give all the rest of her life, willingly, thankfully, for two leagues, only two leagues, less to traverse; for two hours, only two hours, more to spare. Was it the snow that showed everything so distinctly, or was this really the light of morning stealing, cold and pitiless, over a world of white? Toiling, hurrying, panting, all agape with pain and fear, she yet found breath to curse the coming day. And still she hardly knew how or why she was straining nerve and sinew in this desperate race. There could be nothing in common now between herself and the man whom she hated so bitterly, yet loved so well. He had deceived her, ay, as he had deceived many another before it came to her turn (here Waif's small white teeth closed hard on her dainty lip), and would deceive more, no doubt,

hereafter, with the same alluring smile, if through her agency he should escape the penalty of his misdeeds and survive for future treachery. How could he be so false, so cruel, so heartless? Were all men like this, Fin Cooper and the rest, or was John Garnet a vile exception to his kind? She knew not, she cared not. Good or bad, she loved him! she loved him! how could she ever have thought otherwise? and she would do all in her power to save him, cost what it might.

Oh that endless stretch of moor!—those weary, dragging miles! Curse them! Curse them! It was broad daylight already, and she had only now caught sight of the Severn Sea, lowering a dark and sullen line beyond the snowy waste. A band of iron seemed to enclose her head, a weight to drag at each of her limbs, a cold hand to tighten round her heart. What if her strength were to fail, and she should be too late after all!

To see him once again!—once again! Only to look in his face and die! She would be content then, and ask for nothing more. But the time passed, ah! so quickly, and her lagging feet so laboured in the snowdrifts, that he might be taken long before she could arrive at Porlock, and even then the only mercy she asked of Heaven might be denied.

Her lips were parched and dry, her knees trembled, she could hold out at such exhausting speed no longer, and yet she had scarce accomplished half the distance to her goal. She knew that deep, dark ravine well, narrowing yonder in her front to some eight or nine yards from bank

to bank. It would save more than a mile could she cross it at that point where the blighted fir-tree stood. Above and below it widened into a deep precipitous coomb, tangled with brushwood, through which a silver thread of running water laughed and whispered many a fathom down in its slippery bed of stones. No. It was too far to leap, and she must go round. She lost heart utterly; and the wind, rising once more in mocking gusts, seemed to flout and buffet her, driving another snowstorm in her face.

But on its wings it carried a dull, smothered beat, faint and distant, yet drawing nearer with each regular monotonous footfall. It was the tramp of horses, galloping at speed over the snowy surface of the moor; and Waif, eager, erect, motionless, listening with every nerve, as the red hind listens to the tufters, made out distinctly that the nearest rider was far ahead of two or three others in pursuit.

As the blinding storm passed over, that death-chase came fairly into view. Along the side of the opposite hill swept two horsemen at headlong pace, the one a quarter of a mile before the other, and increasing his distance with every stride. A third laboured hopelessly in the rear; and two more, one of whom she recognised as her affianced husband, were making for the head of the coomb, with the obvious intention of hemming in and cutting off the object of their pursuit.

Keener even than a gipsy's eyesight, the instincts of love and hate told Waif that the first rider was John Garnet, the second Abner Gale.

"Have I found thee, oh, mine enemy!" muttered the Parson, plying Cassock with his spurs, while he scanned the ravine before them, and reflected, not without a grim humour, how impossible it seemed that any creature unprovided with wings should reach the other side. He knew that deep and yawning chasm, where the fir-tree stood, well as he knew his own stable door; but he did *not* know the grey horse's dauntless courage, nor the recklessness of a man like John Garnet riding for his life!

Waif, however, could understand and rely on both. Tearing the 'kerchief from her bosom while she ran, she hurried down to the deep precipitous edge at its narrowest part, and waved for the man she loved her signal to come on.

How like him, she thought, to spare a hand, even at such a crisis, and raise his hat from his comely head ere he forced it firmly down and set his horse going for the leap.

"By George! you *are* a flyer," said John Garnet, as Katerfelto, pricking his ears and shortening his stride while he increased his pace, bounded freely from bank to bank, detaching, however, with his hind-feet a large portion of earth and shingle, that went rumbling and rattling down many a perpendicular fathom into the abyss. So that, even while the words were on the rider's lips, the horse stumbled and fell as he landed, rolling forward on his side and shoulder in the snow.

John Garnet, who never let go his reins, was up in an instant; while the horse rose almost as

nimbly, with wild eye and spreading nostril, snorting in terror and defiance, scared alike by his exploit and his fall.

Plunging forward, the buckle of his throat-lash gave way, the bit slipped out of his mouth, and Katerfelto scoured riderless into the waste, leaving John Garnet standing on his feet with the bridle in his hand. A shout of triumph from his pursuers, who were already rounding the head of the coomb, warned him that they had seen the catastrophe and were prepared to take advantage of it. Unarmed and dismounted they could ride him down now, they thought, at their leisure, let the grey horse go where he might.

Among the many faults of his character, none could tax Abner Gale with want of promptitude or decision in an emergency. No sooner was he satisfied that his enemy meant to charge boldly the obstacle in front, than he too, urged no less by vanity than hatred, made up his mind, while he caught hold of the black horse's head, to ride at it, neck-or-nothing, and take his chance!

John Garnet was hardly down and up again, ere the Parson, sitting firmly in the saddle, had forced his horse at the leap, even to the very brink. But, wiser than his master, poor Cassock was fain to be excused. Alas! the rider's strength of seat and hands and limbs, above all, his indomitable will, would take no denial, and the gallant old horse made his effort too late! Chesting the opposite bank, the concussion shot the hapless pair, as if from a catapult, to the very bottom of the chasm.

Even in the turmoil of her feelings, Waif turned sick, while her imagination, rather than her senses, told her the hideous truth; but John Garnet, peering over the brink to where a dead man and horse, with hardly a bone unbroken in either of their frames, lay rolled up in a ghastly heap, could not help murmuring, "'Tis a pity sure, for vile as he is, a scoundrel not worth hanging, no better rider, nor bolder, ever buckled on a pair of spurs!"

To the very bottom of the chasm.

CHAPTER XXX

REPARATION

BUT there was no time for interchange of sentiments, regretful or otherwise, at such a crisis. Fin Cooper and Dick Boss had already coasted round the coomb, and were hastening down its side to the fatal spot. Katerfelto, carrying his rider's saddle, valise, and pistols, galloped across them masterless, into the waste. John Garnet, dismounted and disarmed, for even the short sword he wore had been jerked out of its belt in his desperate ride, felt that he must surrender at discretion. What chance had he against two resolute men on horseback, who knew the moor, were provided with firearms, and had legal authority to use them if required?

"The game's up, Waif," said he; "but you and I have played it out, my lass, to the very last card! I was thinking of you only this morning at daybreak when I stole away from Porlock, and my friends over yonder set up a shout of rage to see my tracks not three minutes old in the snow! If I had but known the country! Well, well! 'Twas a rare burst and a noble leap! You showed me the only spot where it could be done,

and I understood with the first wave of your arm ; but how came you to be here, my pretty Waif, in the nick of time ? "

Oh the kind cruel voice ! the kind cruel words ! It was snowing fast, and the wet Waif dashed from her eyelashes might not have been tears after all.

" I knew they meant to kill you ! " she sobbed. " I heard their vile, wicked plot, and Fin kept me a prisoner in his tent lest I should warn you. Ah ! they little knew Waif, if they thought she could sit and count her fingers when *you* were in danger ! I swore to save you, and I will ! Thank your God, if you Gorgios have one, for this snow-storm. No man living can see twenty paces before him while it lasts. Take off your boots ! "

He stared, wondering if she had gone mad, but Waif was already on her knees dragging at one of his feet with all her might.

She continued, in an eager, hurried whisper, without desisting for a moment from her task, " Close by here, under the birch-tree, is a sheep-track that will lead you safe to the bottom of the coomb. Keep in the brushwood by the water-side, and follow the stream. A mile lower down you will come to Red Rube's hut. They will never think of looking for you there. Tell him Thyra Lovel sent you, and he will hide you for my sake. Farewell, Master Garnet. I—I wish you good luck, and—do not—do not quite forget Waif ! "

Ere she had done speaking, his heavy riding-

boots were drawn on her own shapely limbs. Then she turned away to plunge through the snow without another word.

He stretched his arms towards her. For one brief moment she stood looking at him, less like a woman of real flesh and blood than some visionary phantom of the night To his dying day, John Garnet never forgot that figure of the gipsy-girl, her pale face, her raven hair, the folds of her scarlet hood seen through the slanting downfall of the storm. Those solemn eyes, with their yearning gaze, seemed still bent on him, long after the slender shape had vanished in that grey and thickening gloom ; vanished for ever, to return no more but in his dreams.

Shouts at no great distance warned him that he must attend to his own safety, and, slipping cautiously into the coomb, he obeyed Waif's directions to the letter, keeping studiously under cover in the brushwood, and making his way along the bed of the stream as nimbly as lacerated feet, protected only by hose, would allow. Ere he reached Red Rube's hut, where he found the harbourer at home and willing to give him shelter, he had plenty of time to reflect on his future plans, and to appreciate the devotion and self-sacrifice of the girl whose heart he had won so lightly and cared so little to retain. Pangs he felt, no doubt, of pity, regret, even remorse, but through them all he could not but admit that one glance from Nelly Carew's blue eyes would be enough to make him forget his own thoughtless frivolity, and the gipsy's unreasoning,

uncontrollable affection that was now risking dear life for his sake.

He could not but acknowledge the dangers she must incur toiling through the snow in his heavy riding-boots, that she might draw his pursuers from the path he actually followed. She might perish of cold and exhaustion on the open moor. She might be buried in some snowdrift from which she had not strength to extricate herself. Worse than all, when overtaken and caught, what fatal penalty might not be exacted by the vengeance of that half-savage husband whom she had deceived for the sake of her Gentile love?

If Waif herself entertained any such misgivings, they were swallowed up in the single consideration of outwitting his pursuers to save John Garnet from death.

So she plunged and laboured on, faint, breathless, weary, sustained only by the one earnest aim of her brave and loving heart, listening eagerly for the voices of those who were on her track, and exulting, with fierce and bitter triumph, to lead them farther and farther from their prey.

One more mile. If her strength would last but for one more mile, he must have reached his refuge then, and she would be content to lie down and die. Shrouded in a snowdrift on her wedding-day (she laughed to herself at the conceit), and married, like a Gorgio bride, all in white!

Fin Cooper and Dick Boss, galloping down to

the spot at which the grey horse fell, made sure of his rider at such a grievous disadvantage, and laughed while they pointed out to each other the heavy footmarks printed off distinctly in the snow.

"He'll not travel far in them boots, wading through the drifts!" remarked Dick Boss, who was little given to conversation at the best of times.

"'Tis our hunted stag," answered Fin, showing his white teeth, with a pitiless laugh; "he's beginning to weary already, I can tell by the slot!"

So they followed, with renewed ardour, upward, always upward into the hill, and pointing for the wildest part of the moor.

But the horses were beginning to tire, toiling more than fetlock deep in snow, and the blinding flakes that lashed the faces of their riders not only shrouded everything from their view, but filled up and obliterated the track on which they depended for guidance and success. "We are beat, man!" said Dick, drawing rein sulkily, and wringing the heavy snow from his sleeves and holsters. "There's not a drop of blood left unfroze in my body, and I shall give out!" turning his bridle at the same time doggedly down hill, while the gipsy, trusting to his knowledge of the country, declared his own intention of making a wide sweep forward, hoping thus to catch a glimpse of the pedestrian, and ride him down, so soon as the storm modified sufficiently to distinguish an object at ten paces' distance.

Once parted, the two men had no chance of coming together again. The sheriff's officer, through sheer good luck, did eventually find his way back to Porlock, but Fin Cooper wandered aimlessly on many a mile farther into the wilderness. He, too, was at last obliged to confess himself defeated. Not only baffled in his search, but lost, like an overfed Gorgio, on the moor.

The snow, falling and fallen, so completely effaced or altered every familiar landmark, that he rode blindly round and round, ashamed to admit he was unable to find his way out of this weary, interminable, undulating waste of white.

After a hundred mistakes, a hundred disappointments, he came to a standstill perforce. Floundering through a deep snowdrift, he was compelled to halt and take a survey of the misty surface over which every passing moment made it more unsafe to travel. The storm, that had raged and lulled at intervals, now lifted for a time, disclosing at a hundred paces' distance something that caused Fin to start in his saddle, and brought a blasphemy of malice and exultation to his lips.

Yonder, almost within pistol-shot, lay a motionless heap, half buried, half revealed, and yes, his keen hawk's eye did not deceive him, a horseman's heavy boot protruded from the snow!

With a cry of triumph he spurred eagerly to the spot, and leaped from the saddle in such fierce and hungry hate as impels the pounce of a wild cat—the swoop of a bird of prey.

She lay dead—stone dead. The girl he had

loved all these years. The woman that to-day, this very day, was to have been his wife! And he thought it was John Garnet, whose life he had thirsted to take for a reward of twenty guineas. Twenty guineas to spend in rioting and drunkenness at his wedding-feast! He burst into so wild a shriek of laughter as startled the very horse from which he had dismounted, and fell on his knees beside the rigid form that he had last seen warm and supple, clothed with living grace and beauty, in his tent.

It seemed impossible. She had not surely lain there many minutes, and yet how stiff she had grown and cold! Against that fixed grey face he laid his own, and tried hard in his agony to breathe life into those pale parted lips, but it was hoping against hope, and while he swore that it could not, should not be, his bursting heart told him the truth, and he knew that Thyra Lovel's deep dark eyes would look upon him again, gladly or sadly, never more! Even in his utter misery he saw it all: the ingenious shift, the false track, the artifice by which she had outwitted him, and led him skilfully off the line of his pursuit, to spend his wedding-day with her here, locked in each other's arms, the only occupants of the frozen, desolate waste.

The gipsy's mood was very pitiful and tender while he sat and watched by her corpse in the falling snow, waiting till his horse should be sufficiently rested to carry a double burthen, thinking more in sorrow than in anger of their two blighted lives, and the love he had given so

lavishly without return, wondering in his heathen reasonings why these things were so, wishing in his despair that the storm would fall thicker and thicker to wrap them for ever on this their marriage-bed in its shroud of eternal white.

After a few days, however, all traces of winter again disappeared from those smiling valleys and shaggy woodlands that border the Severn Sea. Not a patch of white was left to spot the swarthy uplands where Dunkerry Beacon lords it over the moor, and along the warm sheltered coast, from Watermouth to Watchet, summer seemed to have returned only softer and kinder for her desertion. But the fairest flower in Devon languished and faded in the genial sunshine, more obviously than she had drooped beneath the storm. Nelly Carew, in deep mourning for her grandfather, looking none the less beautiful in her sorrow, felt so lonely and unprotected now, that in her moments of despondency she almost wished she could die too, like the others, and be at rest.

Katerfelto vainly endeavoured to persuade her that by accompanying him in his flight to the Continent she might probably join John Garnet, who must surely have preceded them to some of the usual refuges for such political outlaws, believing, no doubt, that, accompanied by so beautiful an associate, he could ply his old trade with every prospect of success; but the girl's own sense of right forbade her to think for an instant of such a scheme, and he, too, went his way after Master Carew's funeral, leaving Nelly entirely

forsaken and alone. The neighbours, though liberal in expressions of sympathy, and offers of help which was not required, shook their heads and whispered to each other that there was something unlucky about the lass—things went wrong with all who took a fancy to her. The old grandfather, who couldn't keep his eyes off her, and thought gold wasn't good enough for her to eat off, he died—well—a man in years certainly, but still very little over eighty after all! Then there was that godless parson who broke his neck just above the Witches' Wash-pot, and indeed every bone of his body, so that they could scarce straighten him decently for burial. Was he not a lover of Mistress Nelly's?

As to the young spark, a comely lad, forsooth, and a gallant, who came and went with his grey horse like a flash of lightning, so that nobody in Porlock ever knew what was gone with him, why, it wasn't likely, was it? that she would ever set eyes on *him* again! Altogether, Nelly felt very unhappy and despondent. It seemed hard, at her age, to be left so friendless, so utterly alone in the world.

But one afternoon, when the days were at their shortest, came a letter by the weekly post from Taunton, stamped with a French mark, tied in a bright new ribbon, and directed in a bold masculine hand to Mistress Nelly Carew.

From the date of its receipt the neighbours could not but observe how the girl's eye grew brighter, and the colour returned to her cheek. The hope that had nearly died out in her heart

began to bloom once more, and her trust came back in John Garnet, just as poor Waif's did, but with better reason and a happier result.

She learned that powerful friends had made interest for this proscribed young gentleman at Court. The King was a thorough Englishman, placable, courageous, extremely averse to severity when an enemy was conquered and under foot. John Garnet counted on a free pardon, and even hinted at the possibility of the northern estates reverting hereafter to their rightful owner. Lord Bellinger had made a famous speech on the Cider Bill, which brought him into notice, and gave him, for the time, considerable influence. This influence he had exerted in Master Garnet's favour, reasoning, with characteristic inconsequence, that but for the exploit attributed to Galloping Jack, of which his penetration had discovered the real originator, he would have been buried alive in the West at the very time when he seized his opportunity to distinguish himself in the House of Lords. Nelly must be patient and constant, as the writer vowed to be himself. There was a good time coming, and she must wait.

That Nelly *did* wait, I gather from a picture in the possession of the Garnet family, representing a woman in the bloom of youth, with a pair of outrageously beautiful blue eyes, smiling, from under a mushroom hat, on a child in a white frock and coral necklace at her feet. The whole purporting, as set forth in gold letters on a corner of the canvas, to be a portrait of Dame Elinor

Garnet and her eldest son. If this be indeed the Nelly Carew of his desperate expedition into Devon, I can readily understand that sickness of heart which came over Waif when, peering stealthily into the orchard at Porlock, she espied so comely a damsel in affectionate converse with the man she loved.

But what became of the good grey horse? Tradition, on the authority of Red Rube, affirms that he was never retaken after his bridle broke, but passed on rejoicing to life-long freedom in the moor. The harbourer was wont to declare that as soon as he had forwarded his rider, whom he kept in close hiding for a week, to the little coast town whence an escape was arranged by sea, he himself set out in pursuit of the incomparable stallion, determined to tax all his science and ingenuity for the capture of such a valuable prize. The very first day of his search he came upon the saddle and furniture, from which the horse had kicked himself clear. And many a time afterwards he followed the iron-shod hoof-marks, till the iron too had dropped off, leaving only the print of a smooth oval foot, with the patience and persistency of his trade; but shyer and warier than any red deer, the animal never allowed him to come within hearing, and seldom within sight. Doubtless he joined those herds of wild horses and ponies which to this day roam through the remote coombs and moorland wastes of West Somerset and North Devon, free and unrestrained as the very breeze that sweeps across the scanty herbage on which they

feed. Here it is to be presumed that he fulfilled his destiny, doing good in his generation; for even now, when some bold and reckless rider has been carried more gallantly than usual, in one of those wild, glorious, but exhausting runs that seem peculiar to the West, he lays a loving hand on the reeking neck of his favourite, and observes triumphantly—

"It always tells at the finish. You never get to the end of them when they've a strain of blood that goes back to old Katerfelto!"

THE END

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